

HURTING SISTER: A WOMAN'S
RESPONSE
TO LOSS

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ABSTRACT

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The context of this proposed project is County Line Baptist Church in Goochland, Virginia. The female members of the context experienced difficulties processing the loss of a loved one. If project participants take part in a grief training program, then they will have information and methodology to start the process of addressing their loss. This project will last six weeks. Data collection methods include pre- and post-surveys, revised grief inventory, and focused journaling. A grief support group, “Hurting Sister: A Woman’s Response to Loss,” is being established to assist these women in adapting to loss and allow healing to begin.

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I first want to thank God!!! Without him, I could not have done any of this. To my husband Wes, who sacrificed a lot as I worked on this doctoral project: at no time were you selfish, but you provided the support and love I needed to keep going when I wanted to give up. To my son Franklin: because you continued to strive, that encouraged me to keep pushing as well. I am so proud of you. To my spiritual sisters and my family: you may have not understood the depth of what this journey was like for me but thank you for trying to understand, your encouraging words, and prayers that provided comfort to me along the way. When I was tired and did not want to go on, you reminded me that I could make it. To conclude, I cannot forget to thank County Line Baptist Church Family: many of you were a part of this project. Thank you for your support along this three-year journey.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this doctoral project to my mother and father, who did not get a chance to see the fruit of their labor and all that they instilled in me. I thank you for life. I thank you for setting a good example for me to follow. I also dedicate this project to my oldest sister, Wanda. Thank you for speaking into my life. You passed the mantle to me several years ago. I did not know then the importance of what you did, but I do now. Thank you for showing me the true meaning of ministry. I also dedicate this project to my nephew, T. J. I love you and miss you so much! This doctoral project is also dedicated to my ancestors on whose shoulders I stand. I will never think that I am standing on my own, but because of you I can “stand.”

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INTRODUCTION

This project addresses the importance of grief support in a historic Black church. Founded post-slavery during Reconstruction, County Line Baptist Church of Goochland buried generations of families who have at any given time grieved loss without an established, functioning grief support ministry with a self-developed curriculum for healing. Having this type of counseling grounded in a church whose membership is composed of many related families is especially vital. When the death of a member occurs, it will more than likely impact at least one other family or more outside of the decedent's immediate family on either the maternal, paternal, or both sides of the extended family tree; it is a domino effect of grief impacting all who knew and loved the deceased. This domino effect not only affects family members, but communities inside and outside of the church. Many of the church family members live in the same neighborhoods. When a loss occurs, it can have a lingering affect.

Chapter one of this doctoral studies project opens with me sharing the volume of deaths at the context that made a significant impact on creating a grief support group in addition to my earliest experience with the death of my father when I was nine years old. My emotional responses varied in losing my father so young, losing my mother years later followed by a sister and nephew. Each of these deaths led to an individual journey of grief that collectively helped me to comprehend how to process loss. Therefore, identifying that I exhibit signs of grief and wanting to heal from this painful loss is a

personal journey. My personal testimony is a part of the foundation of the research alongside biblical references (chapters two and four), scholarly information (chapter five) and historical precedence of how rampant death took place and was handled in Europe and within small communities as discussed in chapter three about The Black Plague.

Per chapter six, The Project Analysis, the grief support group, “Hurting Sister: A Woman’s Response to Loss” learned the scholarly background information of the impacts of grief. More importantly, the support group learned that no one grieves the same or in a particular order of emotions as explained in (chapter five) for example, as explains by Kubler-Ross and Kessler Stages of Grief. Furthermore, depending on the established relationship with the deceased, the surviving family members can each grieve differently (chapter one) which adds a different perspective of grief. The research participants in the grief support group showed how much or less of an emotional toil death has taken and still takes on survivors per the grief survey, Revised Grief Experiment Inventory (RGEI) in (chapter six). These results are in keeping with the focused established for the group as explained in chapter one: a) begin processing the grief in a health manner; and b) give voice, written and verbally, to explain the feelings that come with grief.

This research is imperative when you identify the effects of death in a tightly woven community like the project context where historically a culture of people do not seek counseling or freely shares private family matters. Many individuals within t can attest to hearing as children “don’t you go tell anybody our business.” This includes those in the African American culture which is the focus of this doctoral project. Growing up hearing this sentiment follows in adulthood where it is continuedly heard “what happens

in this house stays in this house.” The deflection of outwardly addressing problems and finding solutions, inclusive of healing from grief teaches generations how not to voice your truth, but rather suppress your feelings under the guise of staying strong. As African American women mythically, they can be thought of as super women and being strong is the only recourse to survival. The grief support group dares to take the shame out of sharing the painful emotional journey grief takes all of us on. Death is not a secret. Neither should healing be treated as a secret. Healing is not meant to be endured in silence, behind closed doors eating, crying, or over-spending per pre and post grief surveys results. Each participant of the grief support group was transparent in sharing how they handle grief from as recent as three months prior to the support group meeting to as a long ago as twenty years (chapter six).

So why start a grief support group with African American women versus a family dynamic or specifically for adult men and women who have loss a child or a parent? In the Black church, on these shores of America during and post slavery, women have been the backbone of the church. It is only fitting to have an inaugural support group based in a church to launch with female adult participants. The clarion call for establishing a grief support group in a church with so many related genealogical tree branches is important to the mental health of the church membership. Women are by nature caretakers and make the perfect mentors for others to learn from by testimony and possibly as future grief support facilitators. This inaugural grief support can possibly birth future sub-groups for men, youth, and teens. The participants not only learned significant scholarly and biblical information on grief, but they also know it is important to celebrate and memorialize a loved one who has passed, something many of them had already engaged in as a family.

This part of the journey is about sharing memories, shedding tears of joy, and supporting family and friends when a significant anniversary, birthday, or death date is near. After participants completed the grief support group six-week session during spring 2021, plans were made for a future retreat in the fall 2021 to reunite and offer updates on their grief journeys. “Hurting Sisters” is a pebble throne in one church community pond that has the potential to ripple out into the community at large and offer healing to non-church members who seek a safe, knowledgeable space to share, learn, and grow out of grief.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

After observing the many funerals in the short period that occurred while serving the ministry in my context, my heart went out to the many church members that were affected. By analyzing the long history of County Line Baptist Church, from the establishment of the fellowship to after slavery, to now in the twenty-first century, the church body experienced various types of loss. After having interaction and discussion with many of the church members that suffered multiple losses (i.e., young child death, abuse and retiring of pastor), it was evident that several of them processed their losses the best they knew how. Within the establishment of the church, no bereavement and grief ministry existed to assist the church members through loss.

Ministering in numerous homegoing services and viewing the sadness on many of the member's faces, made me reflect on times I hurt at the passing of a loved one. The most challenging times of my life were the losses of a loved one during the holiday season. With that in mind, I discussed with the pastor the desire to help individuals process their grief. Keeping in mind that for some individuals, holidays are hard to enjoy if grieving. The relationships that were once there no longer existed. A new "normal" had to be established to replace the space of that relationship that is no longer present. A Grief Workshop was designated to start at County Line Baptist Church to assist individuals deal with the grief during the holidays. A few weeks before the workshop

started, many church members told me that they would attend the session. The night of the scheduled workshop, the attendance number failed to match the conversations that I had with individuals who planned to attend. I was not shocked at the turnout because schedules change during the week and grief is not a popular topic to discuss. I believed, for the most part, that the individuals that needed to be part of the group were present in the room.

One of the things that I noticed as I started to facilitate this workshop was that some individuals failed to understand grief. They vocalized that they missed the relationships they had with the loss of loved ones. I tried my best to address the concerns of those in the room, but there was just not enough time. I always wondered if there were additional needs that this one-hour workshop failed to meet. My heart continued to go out to church members that continued to bury loved ones after the termination of this holiday workshop.

In addition, I noticed that those in the holiday workshop not only experienced primary losses, but they mentioned losses that fell into the category of secondary losses as well. Director of Professional Education Jill Harrington-LaMorie, at Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, states that secondary losses are often experienced with the death of a love one-friend or family member.¹ These secondary losses can include family structure, primary relationship, familiar ways of relating to family and friends, support system, lifestyle, financial security, past, future, dreams, identity, loss of a larger self, loss of self-confidence, loss of ability to make decisions, loss of ability to see

¹ Jill LaMorie, "Recognizing and Grieving Secondary Losses," Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), March 21, 2013, <https://www.taps.org/articles/19-1/secondaryloss>.

choices, loss of trust, loss of security, loss of sense of humor, loss of patience, and loss of ability to focus and function. That space that follows examines these losses further.

Loss of family structure occurs when there is an instant change in the family composition. When there is a death in a family, the remaining family members must take on new responsibilities or jobs around the house previously performed by the deceased member. Loss of a primary relationship is the loss of a significant person who was prominent in one's life. The time that was spent with the now deceased member, the conversations, and the activities have now all ended.

Loss of the familiar way of relating to family and friends is the avoidance of family and friends because they fail to know how to respond since the bereaved person is no longer present. What was once familiar now changed. Loss of support systems is the equivalent to the loss of friends, family, community organization, and others who helped to sustain and lend strength daily. When we look for those who were there for us in the past, they seem to disappear.

Loss of a chosen lifestyle is where an individual is being forced to begin a new way of life despite one's personal wishes. For instance, for a surviving spouse this means being single again. Loss of financial security is often associated with death. In many cases, the primary wage earner is gone. For others, there can be loss of employment due to the grief process or serious debt incurred by the deceased or because of the death. The loss of the past creates the inability to share memories of the past journey with the deceased. For survivors who are left alone by death, there will be no "remember when's."

The loss of the future is the immediate cessation of plans made with the deceased. This is a large piece of the grief journey for survivors of a young adult death. No

weddings and perhaps no grandchildren will come for the parent of the deceased. The loss of dreams is a disillusionment resulting from the disappearance of the plans listed above. This especially is true when a young person dies. Survivors grieve not only a past and present with that person, but future hopes, goals, and dreams.

The loss of identity is reflective of the loss of the roles that you no longer fulfill in an ended relationship. This loss of role can be in the home, in the family, at work, among friends, and in the community. The loss of a large chunk of self is the loss of the part of the self that was given to the other person in love and that death seems to have violently ripped from one's being. Intangibles that we freely gave to someone are now gone.

The loss of self-confidence is a survivor's failure to recognize his or her own personal self-efficacy. Making human mistakes on this unknown journey is easy, especially in the initial weeks and months when the death completely occupies our attention. This can lead to feelings of inadequacy or the thought that we cannot do anything right.

The loss of the ability to make decisions is the insecurity following the loss of self-confidence that causes the survivor to look for direction and advice from others. Many survivors wonder, "What should I do now?" The loss of the ability to see choices is the sense that the survivor has no control over his or her life, which leads to the inability to accept that there are still alternatives, options, and allowable preferences. Since the new lifestyle was not a conscious choice, it is harder to see that choices remain.

The loss of trust is the inability to have faith in a positive outcome. Death can shatter one's trust in the world, those around us, and ourselves. Trusting enough to open oneself to love again and share your life can be very painful and many often avoid this.

The loss of security is the inability to feel safe. Knowing that the world is an unsafe, unpredictable place can lead to feelings of anxiety and vulnerability. Uncertainty of what to expect, what will happen next, how we will react or respond can accompany these feelings.

The loss of a sense of humor is the failure to see anything funny. Due to the pain associated with losing an important person in our life, we may not feel like laughing at anything. In the immediate aftermath of the death, we even wonder whether it is still okay to find humor in situations, happiness in events, and enjoyment in life. The loss of patience is the loss of our normal ability to tolerate impaired skills and less-than-ideal reactions. One can become impatient with our inability to recover, feel better, and handle normal stress. This can lead to feelings of inadequacy and failure, as the process of grieving normally lasts for several years.

Finally, the loss of the ability to focus and function reflects the loss of concentration due to preoccupation with feelings of pain and sadness. Many survivors report that their ability to focus became impaired. Focus and full functionality can be difficult to recover, especially if there was trauma involved. A significant loss of energy can accompany the inability to focus. Loss of energy can be both physical and emotional. Some estimated that one hour of grieving is comparable to eight hours of manual labor.

While sitting in the workshop at County Line Baptist Church, I recognized several of the secondary losses that LaMorie mentioned in her article. I also analyzed the stage of grief many members experienced, but I do not believe that it was clear to them. Therefore, with this revelation I set goals for a future small grief group. One goal was to begin providing coping skills to help individuals process through grief and secondly to

explain the feelings that they experienced at any given time during the process. I believe that knowing what you feel is essential to recognize why you are feeling. I believe it is important to give voice to your feelings as one goes through the grieving process.

Professional and Developmental Skills

While pursuing my graduate degree at Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University, I realized that I always had a desire to help individuals work through difficult times. I felt that I was called to counsel individuals through those difficult times by using God's Word, information learned from grief research, as well as gifts and talents God bestowed upon me. While pursuing the Master of Divinity degree, I also studied for the Congregational Care Certificate through Virginia Institute of Pastoral Counselors in Richmond (VIP CARE). This training allowed me to focus on developing pastoral counseling skills. I used these skills to assist individuals in a Christian setting through challenging situations. While studying, I started to realize that I had the strong desire to help individuals that experienced grief due to a loved one dying. I shared my passion with my pastor, and I was connected with the Barnabas Counseling Ministry at my home church St. Paul's Baptist Church in Richmond. I began to work with the other counselors on the ministry team to understand different strategies to help when counseling others.

While serving on the Counseling Ministry at church, I was introduced to a local group that met once a month in the Richmond metro area. This group consisted of professionals from across the tri-cities of Central Virginia, who helped individuals who grieved due to death. When the group met, we discussed and shared the latest news and

information on how to assist others that dealt with grief. Information was also shared with group members about the different types of loss including through prenatal death, loss through suicide, and drug overdose just to name a few.

Through this group, I met individuals who knew how I could gain more education on the topic of grief. Someone shared that there was a Bereavement and Grief Counselor Certificate Program at a local college. After finishing my Master of Divinity Degree, I then pursued the Certificate Program at John Tyler Community College.

During this same time at my home church, under the supervision of the Counseling Ministry lead, I began to engage more with the bereaved of the church. This engagement consisted of my advertising in the church announcements that grief counseling was available at the church. I began to counsel a few church members to assist them through the grief process. As time went on, I applied for a certification with the American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC). I later received a Certificate as Pastoral Care Specialist through AAPC. This certificate and membership with this association allowed me to provide six brief sessions to individuals. After six counseling sessions if things failed to improve for the individual, my duty was then to refer the individual to more professional counseling.

As time progressed, I continued to counsel individuals at my home church. I felt that there was a greater need with a church having membership over 13,000 but only five members were experiencing grief; this was hard for me to believe.

There is such a great need to assist those who deal with loss and not just the loss of a loved one, but the grief felt by other losses as well. I quickly discovered that secondary losses should be included in our discussions, counseling sessions, and

ministering to those who grieve. I believe with that understanding and if addressed by a pastoral counselor, minister, or lay leader, it will be helpful in assisting someone through the grieving process.

Throughout the different stages of life, I experienced some loss, which has allowed me to experience grief. I not always understood grief or aspects of loss. The death of my father was the first loss I experienced as a young child at the age of nine years old. I failed to understand what death was except that the person went to heaven and that I would not see them again. I do not think I completely understood the concept of heaven. However, I knew that it was a place to which one goes to live eternity with God. I do remember the hurtful feeling that I would not see my father again.

As I grew up, I still did not understand death, but I remember feeling the absence of my father in my early teens. I failed to know how to process that feeling. Not understanding death completely at a young age, I believed protected me somehow, but also prevented me from processing “grief.” I recall dealing with the loss of my father and how much it affected my life not to have him present. The loss of my father caused me to experience grief in my early adult life as I experienced other losses in my life.

I also experienced a subsequent loss when my mother went through the process of grieving my father. I believe because my mother grieved and experiencing depression due to his death, my family life changed. Not only did my life change because my father was not around, but my life changed because of my mother’s depression turned into alcoholism for most of my adolescent and teenage years. If I experienced any grief for my father, it was because he was absent during those years. If he were not physically absent, my mother would not have turned to alcohol; and my life would have been like

other children my age, in that, I would have had a father and a mother to raise me. I would have been able to stay in the house into which I was born and play with my friends. The consequent loss I experienced is the loss of not having a life comparable to other children. The alcoholism caused my rearing to look different from many of my friends.

I spent most of my adolescent and teenage years trying to prevent my mother from hurting herself or anyone else while drinking and driving. I did that until that burden became too much for me to handle. As a Christian family and my parents being leaders of the church, I do not remember anyone reaching out to our family during these times of grief to offer any assistance. When I was introduced to a counselor, I learned that it was not my responsibility to take care of my mother. The death of my father and the alcoholism of my mother changed my whole life. The life that I once knew at age nine was much different until I turned eighteen years old. At eighteen years old, some stability was put back into my life and my family. It was time to reestablish some type of “normalcy” for my life going forward. My mother was healed from alcoholism. I had my mother back in my life as a mother should. Life took a detour, and I no longer had that motherly support in my life to show me how to be a mother.

During the first year of my son’s life, I received military orders to move across the country away from my family. This assignment was the first time that I was a long distance away from family for more than six weeks. During this time, I tried to figure out how to be a mother and moving away from the much-needed support of family was a hard transition to make. Three months before moving to Texas (from Maryland) for my

new military assignment, my mother died after having a planned surgery. I failed to know that death was a risk for this surgery. Her death was a surprise to me.

I was once again faced with the loss of a parent. After my mother and I reestablished our relationship as mother and daughter, soon I lost her again, but this time I lost her to death. I felt like out of all the losses I experienced, the loss of my mother was the worse. I did not feel equipped to deal with her being gone. I felt there were things that I did not understand. I cried uncontrollably at times and did not understand why. I was a new mom, and I questioned who would demonstrate how to be a mother. My mother was gone. She was no longer around. I lost my best friend.

All the primary and secondary loss that I know about, I begin to channel all at once with no clue on how to handle them and even if it was healthy to feel. It was not until the chaplain of my military squadron gave me “permission” to grieve, and at that time, I begin to process the grief. Up until this point of losing my mother, I did not allow myself to feel. I felt that I had to be strong and keep doing what needed to be done. I could not give in to the pain. I did not want to feel the anguish of losing her. I had to be strong because I had a son I had to raise, and I thought that is what was expected of me. I needed to move on in the process of grief although it was painful. The opposite of feelings occurred from when I processed my mother’s death and how I processed the death of my eldest sister.

The death of my sister allowed me to see for the first time the glory of God in death. This experience was a refreshing change from losing my mother, which was a painful experience for me. My point of reference for what to feel when a loved one dies was “pain,” but this loss was different. The loss of my sister taught me that not every loss

would be the same. I now know that every loss has its right to be different due to time, relationship, and circumstances. Not all losses will require an individual to react the same mentally, emotionally, and physically.

My sister was diagnosed with breast cancer, and I do not remember ever knowing about the diagnosis, the treatment, or the healing. However, when my sister was misdiagnosed with cancer a second time, I thought “okay,” the healing would happen again for her. It was as if that experience was an emotional roller coaster until the final diagnosis was stage four ovarian cancer and there was no cure. I began to spend a lot of time with my sister during her final days here on earth. I feel so blessed to have spent that time with my sister during her transition. Sharing this experience with my sister allowed me to see death, not as a bad thing, but a reward. A reward that I too hope to receive one day. That is what I saw for my sister. I questioned why God would have my sister called into ministry, matriculate through seminary, and then diagnosed with a terminal illness. I thought when you are called to a ministry that you are expected to get busy doing God’s work, not sick in bed. I later learned that my sister was doing God’s work.

I would often say to my sister that she taught me ministry lessons from the bed. People would visit my sister to provide her encouragement, and they often left encouraged instead. Those moments that I shared with my sister showed me the other side of death. Through her strength and courage, I shared the time of dealing with the diagnosis, to sickness, to transitioning and to her last breath. I would not have been able to handle all of that if it was not for her belief in God.

I cannot understand how anyone could deal with loss without God to provide hope. The belief is that with hope you can get through difficult times along with God’s

help. In addition, through much reflection, I realized what contributed to me dealing with this loss differently was also due to my sister's behavior towards death. The way my big sister handled the terminal illness was not terminal at all. Her perspective on loss allowed me to see some good in what for years I felt was so bad.

Several years later, my nephew, being diagnosed with a rare form of cancer around his heart at twenty-two years old, was a significant loss for me. My immediate family is a close-knit family; therefore, we celebrate together and hurt together. So, finding out that not once but twice that cancer returned around my nephew's heart and that there was nothing else the doctors could do, seemed unreal. The diagnosis was unbelievable, but the treatments and surgeries were not. The procedures and surgeries took a toll on my nephew's body. Watching him suffering from all that he had to endure was difficult, but he kept going.

I watched as my nephew, who was like a son to me, went through this battle. I can imagine that it took strength to endure the fight. I saw my sister be there for her son. I saw my son act like the bigger cousin. I saw my nieces—my nephew's sisters—step in when needed to help their baby brother. My entire family was there for each other during these difficult few years.

God allowed my nephew to experience the joys of an adult so that his disease failed to debilitate him. Most of the things a young adult desired, God allowed my nephew to achieve. He joined the military, got his own apartment, got a car, and he was going to pursue college. When I think about my nephew and his journey with cancer, I smile because even though he left us physically at a young age, he lived his life to the fullest. He did not want to live his life as if he was defeated. My nephew knew well what

went on in his body and the prognosis from the doctors. My nephew re-framed the story and lived out his days strong. With the terminal illness, my nephew mentally kept living.

As experienced and stated in my spiritual autobiography, I faced a loss at every stage of my life. Not all losses were the same and not all were due to death. A loss has occurred when I was young and even up to the age I am now. I not always grieved the loss that was necessary to move on in life. At times, I failed to know how to grieve, and other times, it was easier to process the grief. Through my life experiences, I believe God allowed me to journey through losses of life, knowing that one day I may help someone else journey through them as well.

Due to the losses through which I struggled, I am more aware of when someone else may struggle as well. I do not believe that as a people, as Christians, and even in my context that we do the best at grieving. With so many deaths occurring in the church, I genuinely wonder how loved ones make it through loss after loss. I believe many lean on God's unchanging hand. Then there are others that I feel fail to know what to do. Who talks about the grieving process, which is much needed after a loss? I believe one of the reasons no one talks about grieving is because no one may know how to grieve, and perhaps no one knows what grieving is. I believe that the project I developed will help the members of County Line Baptist Church define grief and begin to grieve well after given the right resources, which will allow healing to begin.

Ministry Model

Grief is the normal response of sorrow, heartache, and confusion that comes from losing someone or something important to you. Grief can also be a human response after

a disaster or other traumatic event was experienced.² The process of grieving is necessary after any loss. With loss comes change, which I believe is one of the main reasons many people choose not to grieve or find it hard to grieve well. The loss brings on the change of one's life as once known. That change affects routines, relationships, and roles in a person's life.

I believe that if we allow ourselves to grieve completely, it allows the loss to become a reality. Many individuals have a problem with "change" in general, let alone all the changes that take place when there is a loss. I believe that change is at the cusp of grief, and the two can be very painful.

I believe as painful as grief is at times, it can be done well. The implementation of my project focuses on defining grief to my contextual members. Once the members understand grief, then I will explain the stages and provide tools to allow the church members to go through the stages of grief in a safe environment by way of a support group. Sometimes individuals do not talk about grief; I believe it was never fully comprehended and perhaps even considered weak to experience grief. I believe openly talking about grief and allowing oneself to go through the grief process can be helpful to heal and adapt to all the changes that take place due to the loss.

Grief can be experienced from any loss. Grief is a natural reaction to loss. Grief is both a universal and personal experience. Individual experiences of grief vary and are influenced by the nature of the loss. Some examples of loss include the death of a loved one, the ending of a significant relationship, job loss, loss through theft, or the loss of

² Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "Tips for Survivors: Coping with Grief after a Disaster or Traumatic Event," Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, <https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma17-5035.pdf>.

independence through disability.³ Allowing members in my context to experience grief to any loss they experience is necessary for healing. Also, important is realizing that one loss may bring an individual in the door for counseling, but the individual may experience other losses as well.

Psychiatrist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross developed the theory that defined the Stages of Grief as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, and finding meaning. Dr. Kubler-Ross discovered that there are five stages that a person who is experiencing terminal illness or dying may experience.⁴ She later discovered that the survivor of the deceased can experience these stages as well. At some point in human life, loss will be experienced, which in turn will bring on the intense emotion of grief and may experience these stages. These stages will be discussed in length in chapter five.

Dr. Kubler- Ross failed to anticipate the stages of grief being a progression cycle where individuals will experience each stage for a length of time and move on to the next stage. She instead wanted to explain the different emotions one would undergo while experiencing grief. That as one experiences grief, one can move around stages and tasks of processing grief, as feelings are resolved. Giving individuals in the process the freedom to move around or oscillate back and forward as desired as much as needed is part of the healing process. I would include the dual grief process as well into the ministry model for my context to understand.

³ Mayo Clinic, "Support and Bereavement Groups: What Is Grief," Mayo Clinic, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/patient-visitor-guide/support-groups/what-is-grief>.

⁴ Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, "Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and the Five Stages of Grief," Grief and Sympathy, <https://www.griefandsympathy.com/elizabeth-kubler-ross-5-stages-grief.html>.

In my doctoral project, I addressed the tools necessary to assist the women of County Line Baptist Church to deal with the death of a loved one. I hope that within my project the women could identify the changes that occurred in their life due to the loss and used that information to learn ways to adapt to the changes that occurred in their lives. I believe that accepting the change and finding a way to navigate it relates to the grief process that one experiences. If one can accept the difference in one's life that occurs after a loss, I believe then they will move through the process of grieving better, which leads to their healing.

With this project, I provided tools for coping with grief. I believe some of the ways is to cope is to express one's feelings, participate in rituals, understand primary and secondary loss as a loved one dying affects them. Being able to define what is felt and know when to seek help and find hope on the journey through relationship with God is important.

I think that it is often difficult to put into words what one feels, especially if they experience grief. I believe the stereotype associated with grief is that one should be over the emotions of the loss, do not discuss it and move back to a healthy life quickly. However, through personal and professional experience this rarely happens. We can easily say when we are happy or joyful but to put into words what we feel in the grieving process can be challenging but necessary.

As it relates to developing or participating in rituals, I believe one of the reasons grieving can be complicated is because we are often accustomed to routine and resistance to anything that causes change. When each day of one's life is developed through a routine, then changing any part of the routine can cause grief. I believe this is especially

true for special events such as holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries. Addressing how to participate in or establish new rituals is okay; it is okay to not continue the same routine year after year, when things are not the same since the death of the loved one. This document discusses rituals later.

Sometimes persons can place expectations upon the griever. The expectation of others on the griever causes the individual not to explain that they feel any grief at all from a loss to rush past their feelings as if they are invalid. This can be easily done with individuals who experience disenfranchised grief. Disenfranchised grief can occur when society does not give the griever permission to grieve. This happens when someone perhaps lost a child to gun violence and his or her child is the perpetrator. Grief regardless of how it occurred should be respected and have a place to feel. As this project looks at grief, it will also address disenfranchised and other types of grief.

Feeling grief and getting through the grief process may not be cut and dry, as one would like to believe. Everything mentioned and omitted additional thoughts all will have to be considered as the griever goes through the process. Sometimes loss also accompanies other problems such as unresolved issues in a relationship. When trying to cope with grief, it is helpful to clearly understand if there are unresolved issues that are preventing one from experiencing the stages of grief and healing. To entirely heal from the process, one must deal with the root of problem as this may be helpful to get through the grieving process.

Knowing when to seek help while going through the grieving process is also important. There may be some point that a ministry of a support group or pastor may not be equipped to handle an individual experiencing complicated grief, PTSD, or severe

depression. In that case, that individual will need a referral to seek professional counseling to live an emotional healthy life filled with faith, hope, and joy.

Happiness is based on circumstances, but joy is possible to have if the Holy Spirit lives on the inside of a person. Several types of bereavement and grief counselors, hospice chaplains and oncologists told me that “hope” is the last thing to go when someone is dying. I believe if there is a will to have joy after a loss, that it is possible to find hope as well. I want to provide and discuss tools that will help participants in this project and others in my context to get through the grieving process on the other side, healthy and whole. I believe through hope and applying the word of God through this process that all things are possible.

What Will Be Learned Through the Doctoral Project

The goal of this project is to learn the following:

1. Explore how change affects a person that has experienced a loss.
2. Explore if African Americans deal with grief differently compared to other ethnicities.
3. Explore what tools help individual process grief.
4. Explore what hinders an individual from processing grief.
5. Exploring why or if African American individuals do not seek counseling.
6. Exploring how African American women experience grief.
7. Exploring is there a cultural issue why African American men may not seek help to deal with grief.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

All throughout scripture, one sees the repetitive themes of grief and lament. Job experiences multiple losses (Jb. 1:1-22). David and Bathsheba lose their child (2 Sm. 12:14-24). Naomi experiences a season of bitterness with the loss of her husband and two sons (Ru. 1:1-22). One can even suggest that Jesus experienced anticipatory grief in the Garden of Gethsemane facing his future death on the cross (Mk. 15:33-34, Lk. 24:44-46).

This chapter analyzes a specific grief narrative found in John chapter eleven that provides hope. From this account, this chapter focuses on the loss of a loved one and the reaction to that death in biblical culture. This chapter discusses how Mary and Martha modeled grief in John 11:17-44 after losing their brother Lazarus. The background of lament in the Old Testament, and how persons perceived death during a New Testament context will also be discussed. Jesus' reaction to the death of his beloved friend Lazarus, and how Jesus viewed death can also serve as a model for grief that one can follow today.

After providing a literary analysis of the biblical text—although useful information within this text exists—this chapter only discusses information pertinent to the theme of the project. The doctoral project utilizes specific methods observed from this biblical text to implement in the grief support curriculum that will assist the women of County Line Baptist Church to help them navigate loss.

Loss is a universal experience that, at some point, everyone will experience. It crosses boundaries of gender, ethnicity, and age. How one deals with loss may vary but usually the natural reaction is grief. Grief may look different, but it is a common denominator after the death of a loved one. Many life events—including past losses—cause different variations of grief. Grief can follow the loss of a loved one, but persons also experience grief after suffering the loss of a treasured animal companion, the loss of a job, the loss of a home, or other possessions of significant emotional investment.¹

Leslie Allen also agrees with this assessment. Allen, a renowned Old Testament scholar and volunteer chaplain for a hospital, provided in her book a compilation of first-hand encounters with patients and how believers handle grief in comparison to the book of Lamentations. It is a great model for how a group or church community can heal from grief.

Loss affected the County Line Baptist Church family many times. Over the course of one calendar year, this mid-sized rural church—consisting of 300 plus members—bury at least ten or more church members a year on average. Of note, this number has increased in the last year, possibly due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the world.

Many of the individuals within the church are biologically related. When one individual in the church dies, it affects not only one's immediate family, but the lives of many in the church community. A common role of the church minister is to officiate a home-going service (funeral) for one of the members. The pastor realizes that not just the immediate family is affected by the deceased, but about ten to fifteen other church members are affected. Finding out that all these church members are biologically related,

¹ Psychology Today, "Grief," Psychology Today, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/grief/>.

not just one church member may be grieving, but several others are grieving. While unique challenges in pastoring a church community where these dynamics exist, tremendous opportunities for the power of the gospel to be preached and displayed in fresh ways—especially when dealing with loss in the church.

In the context, persons often address loss and grief with a sense of pain, hopelessness, and even an “I am strong” mentality and show no emotions. Although these are methods to manage loss, one wonders if it is the best way to do so. This biblical account discussed in this chapter shows one how to begin the process of grief and shows the alternative ways of expressing grief in ways that provide hope to those who mourn, knowing that there is life beyond the grave. If given the tools necessary to process grief, the women of County Line Baptist Church will gain a fuller understanding and wonder of the resurrected Christ and thus be a greater source of help and healing to those around them.

Literary Study

The book of St. John is a qualitatively different document than the other three synoptic gospels—differences that Clement of Alexandria explains. Clement calls John the “spiritual Gospel” in contrast with the other gospels, which dealt with external facts—or more literally—“the things of the body.”² The death of the body is one way “the things of the body” is reflected in this book of the Bible. This chapter uses the following biblical translations to survey this pericope of John 11:17-44: New International Version, New American Bible, New American Standard Bible, English Standard Bible, New Revised

² Robert M. Grant, “The Origin of the Fourth Gospel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 69, no. 4 (1950): 305, doi:10.2307/3261383.

Standard Version, Darby Bible, New King James Bible, New Interpreter Study Bible, and Anchor Bible.³

There are different perspectives of this chapter by theologians. In his journal article, “The Baptismal Raising of Lazarus: A New Interpretation of John 11,” Bernhard Lang notes that, “The reader of the Lazarus chapter is immediately confronted with the typically Johannine image of Jesus: he is an all-knowing divine figure.”⁴ From a linguistic perspective, John’s writing in chapter eleven differs little with the rest of his gospel. John uses several interesting word choices rarely used elsewhere in scripture. A key example of this is “Jesus Wept” (Jn. 11:35). The word for wept (ἐδάκρυσεν) is used nowhere else in scripture in that exact form and gives the idea of crying silently, while others around him likely wailed. Likewise, John 11:38 uses the phrase “deeply moved” (ἐδάκρυσεν) to describe Jesus’ demeanor when he came to the tomb. Writers in the New Testament only use this word construction four other times with the English Standard Bible translating the same word elsewhere in the New Testament as “scold” and to “sternly charge.”

Another significant literary point to mention is Jesus’ use of the phrase “I am” (Εγώ εἰμι) to Martha. This is the fifth of seven major “I am” statements John records in his gospel (Jn. 6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 9; 11, 14). John records these statements to ensure his readers have no doubt about who Christ was and who he claimed to be. One other point worth noting is Jesus’ statement to his disciples that Lazarus’ sickness would not result in

³ All biblical citations will be from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted, John 11:17-44.

⁴ Bernhard Lang, “The Baptismal Raising of Lazarus: A New Interpretation of John 11,” *Novum Testamentum* 58, no. 3 (2016): 301-317.

death. According to a study by Kim, many other Johannine sayings—including this statement—have dual meanings.⁵ In another sense, these events led inevitably to Jesus' death and the Father glorifying him. Jesus' sentence does not promise that "this particular sickness will not pass-through death; rather, he promises it "will not terminate in death."⁶

Critical Exegesis

The first few verses of John chapter eleven set the stage for the seventh miracle Jesus performed in the Gospel of John. To this point, he turned water into wine (2:1-11), healed a nobleman's son (4:46-54), healed the man at the pool Bethesda (5:1-15), multiplied loaves and fish (6:1-14), walked on water (6:15-21), and restored sight to a blind man (9:1-12). John gave all six of the preceding signs with the purpose that those looking on would both see and believe; this final miracle is no exception. It emphasizes the climatic point that summarized all of Christ's teaching—that he was the resurrection and the life.

The geographical location for this grand demonstration is Bethany—a small town just under two miles outside Jerusalem. Far from a booming metropolis, the literal meaning of the word Bethany is "the house of the poor." To the poor of the world Christ came, and it is to the poor of the world where he will display his power over death and the grave.

⁵ Stephen S. Kim, "The Significance of Jesus' Raising Lazarus from the Dead in John 11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168, no. 669 (2011): 53–62, <https://search-ebscohost-com.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0001819770&site=ehost-live>.

⁶ Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 657.

Jesus' friend Lazarus became sick. At the time, Jesus is somewhere in the Transjordan region, likely requiring at least a day's journey for messengers to reach him. When news arrived that Lazarus was sick, Jesus stayed two days longer at his current location. Lazarus was possibly already dead, even as the messengers informed Jesus of the news. After two days of deliberation, Jesus spoke these words to the disciples, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep" (Jn. 11:11 NASB). As biblical commentator D. A. Carson observes, "The contrast between the plural our friend and I am going is not accidental: Jesus alone is the resurrection and the life (v.25)."⁷

Jesus arrived in Bethany four days after Lazarus' death. According to Stephen Kim in his article "The Significance of Jesus' Raising Lazarus from the Dead in John 11," Jesus' discussion with Martha revealed the nature and theology of the miracle (w. 17-27). Kim writes "As the seventh and climactic sign of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, this miracle completes the selected Johannine signs that present Jesus as the promised Messiah and the Son of God. This miracle took place in the context following the Jewish Feast of Dedication (10:22-42) and preceding the Passover of Jesus' death (chaps. 12-20)."⁸

John 11:35 gives its reader a true indication of Jesus' humanity. "Jesus wept" (literally translated "silently burst into tears") holds much greater significance than being the shortest verse in scripture; it gives an inside picture of Christ's care for humanity and deep personal love. N.T. Wright states,

⁷ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 409.

⁸ Kim, "The Significance of Jesus' Raising Lazarus from the Dead in John 11," 56-57.

What grief within Jesus' own heart was stirred by the tears of Mary and the crowd? We can only guess. But among those guesses, we must place, not grief for other deaths in the past, but grief for death still to come: his own... There is a line straight on from Jesus' tears in verse 35 to the death in which Jesus will share, not only the grief but also the doom of the world.⁹

The biblical text shows a miracle, but the principal focus of the narrative is that John wants to see if Martha, Mary, the Jews, and the reader believe in Jesus' identity. Lazarus' death—not his resurrection—brings about the implausible glorification of God, just as Jesus brings God's glorification to fullest expression and completion on the cross—not on Easter.¹⁰

Historical Analysis

Essential to the reader is understanding the customs of the time. This section identifies a few of the societal and cultural norms relating to death. However, scriptures referencing Lazarus perhaps failed to explicitly list these norms. To show someone in mourning, the Death Wail was highly significant in that region during that era, as well as the wearing of sackcloth, burial wrapping, and soul hovering. The book of Lamentations reflects national traditions from which survivors can draw. Grief is a necessary part of life. The Israelite culture had grieving ritual traditions. Grief and how it is expressed is not only referenced in this scripture but in other books of the Bible as well. In

⁹ N. T. Wright, *John for Everyone: Part 2, Chapters 11-21* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 11.

¹⁰ Wilhelm H. Wuellner, "Putting Life Back into the Lazarus Story and Its Reading: The Narrative Rhetoric of John 11 as the Narration of Faith," *Semeia* 53 (1991): 123, <https://search-ebscohost-om.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0000844735&site=ehost-live>.

Lamentations, persons use these conventions for mourning the general calamity of the siege and fall of Jerusalem, and its ramifications.¹¹

Having as many mourners as possible at the time of death was an indication of family honor. Mourning usually included loud wailing and beating of the breast (normally a female gesture, but sometimes practiced by men at the time of death).¹² Persons back then almost universally regarded comforting the bereaved as a moral and social responsibility. It was customary that when a person died, a loud wail would be released to let the community know what had occurred. “This is a sign for the relatives to begin demonstrating their sorrow. This death wail is referred to in connection with the first-born of Egypt.”¹³ In chapter three, we find in explaining an historical crisis yielding massive deaths and an outpouring of grief during the fourteenth century Black Plague, wailing, praying, and mourning was an alarm constantly ringing through the streets of Europe for days on end. Although in the scripture referenced in this doctoral project, the act of “wailing” and “beating of chest” was for friends and family members to provide comfort to those in mourning.

During the biblical culture, from the time that the death wail is heard until the burial takes place, relatives, and friends continue their lamentation. The prophet Micah compares it to the cry of wild beasts or birds: “Therefore I will wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked: I will make a wailing like the dragons and mourning as the owls”

¹¹ Allen, *A Liturgy of Grief*, 8.

¹² Richard L. Rohrbaugh and Bruce J. Malina, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 199.

¹³ Fred H. Wight, *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands* (Chicago, IL: The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1953), 1,
<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=z2W9daK2Ac%3d&tabid=232&mid=762>.

(Micah 1:8). Along with the death wail often came the beating of the breast, another method of expressing sorrow (Lk. 23:48). Tears flow freely at such times for those who mourn and are a definite means of bringing comfort to sorrowing hearts (Jn. 11:33).¹⁴ The verb often rendered in English translations as “groan” in John 11:33 (King James Version), means literally ‘to snort’ and is used of horses. It is glossed as “deeply moved” only in the Gospels; elsewhere in Greek literature it is accompanied by the dative of a person to mean “admonish, sternly rebuke.”¹⁵ Following the procession to the grave to bury the loved one, women returned to their homes alone to begin the thirty days of ritual mourning. During this time, they usually sat on the floor.¹⁶ The wearing of sackcloth in times of grief was another traditional custom. People often wore sackcloth during the time of mourning or when they sought repentance from God.

After death, the body is then put upon a bier, with a pole at each corner, and thus carried on the shoulders of men to the tomb for burial. This is like today’s custom when pallbearers carry the casket of the dead towards the grave at a cemetery. Males and females walked separately from the funeral procession to the grave.¹⁷ This act is still customary in many religions as a final goodbye, as the spiritual leader commits the body to the ground. The people in the house with Mary were undoubtedly women (although on funeral occasions men were customarily permitted to be present).¹⁸

¹⁴ Wight, *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands*, 2.

¹⁵ Brian K Blount, ed., *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 199.

¹⁶ Rohrbaugh and Malina, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 199.

¹⁷ Rohrbaugh and Malina, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 199.

¹⁸ Rohrbaugh and Malina, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 199.

Within this culture, people were often buried in caves with stones—usually disk-shaped—rolled along a groove into place in front of the tomb to protect the contents from animals, the weather, and thieves. The mourners wrapped the dead and left the body lying on the floor in the antechamber.¹⁹ After a year, when the flesh had rotted off, family members would often return to collect the bones and put them into a box. They would usually then put the box of remains into a hole in the wall.

In that context, they wrapped the deceased with long cloth strips. Usually, they would cover the face with a napkin like a large handkerchief, and then bind the hands and feet together to keep them straight.²⁰ The description of Lazarus, when Jesus called him forth from the tomb, indicates that they practiced the same custom in those days. “The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go’” (Jn. 11:44). In addition, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus wrapped the body of Jesus. “Then took them the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen cloths with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury” (Jn. 19:40). When affordable, persons would use embalming spices to help with the scent of a decaying body.

Visiting and consoling the bereaved in the days immediately following a close relative’s loss was an essential duty of Jewish piety. Neighbors would provide the first meal after the funeral.²¹ This same type of fellowship also exists in modern times, which is called a repast as a way of fellowshiping with those who lost their loved ones. The

¹⁹ Craig S. Kenner, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 283.

²⁰ Kenner, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 293.

²¹ Kenner, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 283.

first week of deep grief after a close relative's burial would be spent mourning at home, sitting on the floor in the company of friends. This custom—called shivah (for “seven” days)—is still practiced in Judaism today and is very helpful for releasing grief.

Mourners abstained from adornment for the next three weeks and from ordinary pleasures for the next year.²²

Additionally, persons believed that the soul hovers over the body of the deceased person for three days, intending to re-enter it. One source note that “Bar Kappara taught, the whole strength of the mourning is not till the third day.”²³ Persons believed that when the soul sees that its appearance changed and that decomposition set in, it departs with the understanding that death is irreversible.²⁴ There are several indications in the text that represent that Lazarus was dead and end-of-life rituals took place. First, this means that Jesus finds Lazarus dead beyond any hope of resuscitation. John preserves the four-day window to show that Lazarus could not regain life. Secondly, they put Lazarus inside of a tomb, which was another indication that a proper burial took place. Third, it is necessary for a gathering of the Jews to be present because Lazarus is dead (Jn. 11:18-19).

²² Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate(R) Dictionary*, 11th ed., Merriam-Webster, 2012, https://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/mwcollegiate/shivah_or_shiva_also_shive/0?institutionId=8909.

²³ George R. Beasley-Murray, “John,” in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 36, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1999), 190.

²⁴ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 411.

Jesus' Perspective on Death

Soul Sleeping

Jesus did not see death like his followers or those within the community. Jesus often refers to the euphemism of “sleeping” to define death.²⁵ Karl Barth also states that many New Testament writers categorize death as a natural act of “falling asleep” (Jn. 11:11, 1 Cor. 15:6, Acts 7:60). This expression conveys a feeling of peace. Barth believes it expresses the freedom of faith and love present in the New Testament community. New Testament writers use sleeping to describe death because Jesus bore the curse of death. His resurrection removed the permanence of death. Now when one dies, one transitions into eternal life.²⁶

For believers today, those that experience the death of a loved one may believe that Jesus appeared too late, but the text shows that Jesus speaks words to the dead person and raises the person from the dead. In John 11:14-15, the gospel says that “Lazarus is dead; and for your sake, I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe.”

Jesus' thought reflects something fundamental connected with how God relates to God's people in Mark 12:24-27 and Jesus' role as the Son of God who also is the Son of Man. Hence, he declares, “Lazarus has fallen asleep; I am going to wake him out of sleep!” (Jn. 11:11). One sees the same outlook on death in Mark 5:39 as Jesus moves to wake a child from death, just as he was to wake Lazarus.³⁰ John deliberately uses the

²⁵ Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 4th ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 169.

²⁶ Keith Randall Schmitt, *Death and After-Life in the Theologies of Karl Barth and John Hick: A Comparative Study* (Waterloo, IA: Rodopi, 1985), 73.

term sleep. Death with God provides eternal life that never ends. This provides hope for those who grieve the death of a loved one; that perhaps their loved one is only asleep.

Life Transitioning

Jesus states that he is the resurrection and the life (Jn. 11:25-26). The word “life” is a reference to eternal life.²⁷ In the text, Jesus explains each clause separately. The miracle in John chapter eleven, as theologian Kim mentions, brought the people’s opinions and responses to a decisive point. For those who wanted to believe in Jesus, this miracle provided the ultimate evidence for faith in the promised Messiah and the divine Son of God (Jn. 11:27). But for those who persisted in unbelief, this miracle could give them the ultimate grounds for rejecting Jesus.

This statement is true today for those who lost a loved one. The passing of a loved one provides an opportunity for those that believe Jesus is the Messiah, to realize their loved ones are not dead, but still live eternally. This belief can bring hope to those who grieve—a hope that says if they too believe, they will see their loved ones again someday. Those who do not have faith and belief in Jesus Christ may not have hope and may feel that the deaths of their loved ones are the final acts of their lives. The critical point of this story is that one must first believe. As a believer you are aware that Jesus holds the keys to both life and death. Having this awareness may affect how one grieves.

Jesus calls himself the resurrection. Restoration from death to life is only possible as it proceeds from one who has the power to resurrect. Jesus teaches that he is the beginning of life. He is the new Adam that took away the curse. Next, he adds that

²⁷ Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 153.

continuing to live is also the work of his grace that leads to eternal life. John's gospel plays a pivotal role in defining the power of the Godhead. Elsewhere, no other gospel writers refer to Jesus as the Word of God, the creator of the universe, the equal of God, or the one sent from Heaven and soon to return. This gospel is the only place where Jesus claims that to see him is to see the Father. Nor does any other gospel attest that to reject him is the same as rejecting God the Father. The credentials John specifies lay a significant foundation for establishing Jesus as the resurrection.²⁸ Jesus establishes a new spiritual principle in stating, "He that believeth on me, though he dies, yet shall he live" (Jn. 11:25). Jesus is the resurrection in that by his living Spirit, he regenerates the sin-fallen children of Adam. Jesus is the resurrection, the truth, the life, and the way.²⁹

After having a dialogue, Jesus asks Martha "Do you believe?" (Jn. 11:26). When doing so, he asks not to ascertain if she believes that he is about to raise Lazarus from the dead, but if her faith can go beyond the last day when all humankind shall rise, to a personal trust in him being the resurrection of life. The belief in Jesus' identity is paramount in receiving the revelation that a loved one lives eternally.

In John 11:26, Jesus expounds on how he is the life. Day by day, the outward person decays. However, true life is not the physical body; it is the spirit, and the spirit will continue to live. Therefore, far from distracting anything from true life, death aids in its progress. The inward spirit of a humankind is renewed day-by-day (2 Cor. 4:16). God's presence within is the liberating force at the time of bodily death.³⁰ After listening

²⁸ Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 167.

²⁹ John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John: Part Two 11-21 and the First Epistle of John*, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids, MI: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961), 8.

³⁰ Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 8.

to Jesus, Martha had the full revelation that he is indeed the resurrection in this world and the world to come. She had the assurance that he was the breath of life. He completely controlled all that existed.

Death Must Obey Jesus

John 11:15 states, “Lazarus is dead; and for your sake, I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe.”³¹ Lazarus had to die so that Jesus could raise him from the dead and convince others of who he truly is. Before Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, he is sensitive to the grief and pain that Mary and Martha experience. Jesus learns that Mary and Martha want him in Bethany, and Jesus puts his life on the line and attends to their desires. The purpose of this visit goes well beyond the power of Jesus to heal and comfort; its purpose is to expose his dominion over death—the last enemy he had to face.³² After hearing that the one Jesus loved was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. The decision to delay is, therefore, to be explained as not a deliberate refusal but to wait for his Father’s timing.³³ According to Kim, “The delay indicates that Jesus was operating by a divine plan and according to a divine timetable.”³⁴

The synoptic gospel writers understood that persons knew Jesus to raise the dead. All three report the raising of Jairus’s daughter (Mt. 9:18-26, Mk. 5:21-43, Lk. 8:40-56), and according to Luke, Jesus also raised a widow’s son at Nain (Lk. 7:11-17). John’s

³¹ Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 169.

³² Max Lucado, *The Inspirational Study Bible: New King James Version* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1995), 1274.

³³ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 407.

³⁴ Kim, “The Significance of Jesus’ Raising Lazarus from the Dead in John 11,” 54.

story of raising Lazarus while unparalleled is not without precedent in the synoptic tradition.³⁵ Therefore, Jesus' credentials were never to be questioned as to whether he would be able to heal Lazarus (if he was able to travel in time to his bedside), not to mention raise him from death (which is what Jesus knew only He was able to provide as one who restores).

Comparative Analysis

John claims that Mary and Martha were sisters that had a brother. The title "sister," which applies to Martha as well as Mary, may indicate kin and Christians in general, as well as a specific role in the mission. The third member of the family is a brother named Lazarus. Luke does not mention Lazarus as being a brother, but the Book of John does.

Mary and Martha's interactions with each other and those around them when dealing with the death of their brother are one of the focal points in this narrative in John chapter eleven. Most often, when scripture describes the sisters, the author appears to compare these two women. John identifies Mary as the woman that anointed Jesus' feet. In detail, Mary's action resembles that of the sinner in another of Luke's Galilean stories. In Luke, however, the anointer remains anonymous, and no link is intended between her and Martha's sister in chapter ten. These two unrelated figures in Luke fused into one by the time John wrote his account. Perhaps those in Johannine circles reasoned that the

³⁵ Wendy E. Sproston, *The Lazarus Story within the Johannine Tradition* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 122.

woman who anointed Jesus' feet likely was the same woman who faithfully sat at his feet.³⁶

Martha

Martha's name means female lord.³⁷ In John 11:20, Martha is the sister that approaches Jesus upon his arrival to Bethany by calling him Lord according to the New International Version. If they spoke Aramaic, the form of their address was probably "Rabbi" thereby acknowledging Jesus as their Master and identifying as his disciples without confessing his deity.³⁸

Martha had faith that her brother would be alive if Jesus came to Bethany at an earlier time. Until then, she failed to encounter Jesus' power over life and death. However, even in her incomplete knowledge, Martha believes that if Jesus prays to God, asking God to raise Lazarus from the dead, that God will answer Jesus' prayer. Martha demonstrated deep faith, even in a hopeless situation. In verse twenty-three, Jesus tells Martha that her brother will rise again. Martha did not understand the depth of what Jesus says because she held a Pharisaic Judaic belief of the resurrection—a view denied by the Sadducees (Mk. 12:18-27, Acts 23:8). Only the unfolding drama discloses the meaning of Jesus' words.³⁹

³⁶ North, *The Lazarus Story within the Johannine Tradition*, 119.

³⁷ Step Bible, "John 11," Stepbible.org, <https://www.stepbible.org/?q=reference=John.11&options=HNVUG>.

³⁸ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 406.

³⁹ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 412.

Martha states in John 11:26 that she understands her brother would be raised from death on the last day. “Yes,” Martha said, “he will rise when everyone else rises, on the last day” (Jn. 11:26). However, this is not what Jesus meant.⁴⁰ Jesus wants Martha to see him entirely as the Resurrection of Life for all times—not just in the last days. Jesus replies in paraphrase, “I in person, am that Resurrection, that Life and that Last Days, here and now.”

Mary

In John 11:28-32, when Martha finishes her conversation with Jesus, she runs to tell her sister Mary in private that Jesus is present. At the time, Mary is in the house with those close to the family and other Jews in the community comforting her. Brunner believes the text reminds readers of the Parousia, of the coming of the Son of Man, at which time the dead would be raised. It seems possible, but one cannot say more. The fact that the news of the Teacher’s “pareimi-presence” results in Mary’s “raised” state shows the future raising of Jesus Christ, and the power in the present to raise one from depression.⁴¹ This is hopeful news for those individuals left behind by the death of a loved one.

Mary’s name means “beloved” or “plump.”⁴² The text portrays Mary as the one sitting quietly at Jesus’ feet. She jumps up quickly after Martha tells her that Jesus wants to see her. The Jews in the home think that grief overwhelmed her and that she runs out

⁴⁰ Tyndale House Publishers, *The Life Recovery Bible: New Living Translation* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishing, 1998), 1359.

⁴¹ Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 628.

⁴² Step Bible, “John 14:-27,” [Stepbible.org](https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=ESV|reference=John.11.14-John.11.27&options=HNVUG), <https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=ESV|reference=John.11.14-John.11.27&options=HNVUG>.

to go to the burial site to grieve (Jn. 11:31). To comfort Mary, they rush out after her. None of them has any idea they are about to see a miracle that will challenge their understanding of life, death, and resurrection.⁴³

The New Revised Standard Version states that Mary's greeting was the same as Martha—with complaint and confidence. The text then finds Mary at Jesus' feet. In both Luke and the Book of John, Mary is at Jesus' feet, symbolizing her devotion. Through this ordeal, Mary appears never to stop showing her honor for Jesus, even in her unbelief. Jesus asks the sisters, "where have you laid him?" At that point, the Lord—the resurrection—performs the miracle of bringing Lazarus back to life (Jn. 11:31-43). Mary fades from the story after speaking with Jesus.⁴⁴ Enormous grief could be what drew immediate compassion from Jesus.

Though the two sisters' roles were very different in this narrative in John chapter eleven, each plays a critical part in the story's development. Mary's role gives insight into the mindset of those that grieve privately. Mary stays at home with a few family members and friends. She did not move from her home until Martha comes to get her to report Jesus is outside. When Mary goes out to meet Jesus, she questions Jesus and falls at his feet in a posture of reverence. Although Mary questions Jesus, she never stops honoring him. When dealing with loss, it is okay to question God and ask why and not lose reverence for God. Martha, too questions why Jesus was not available to save her brother. Still, she also indicates faith, hope, and the ability for humanity to expand

⁴³ North, *The Lazarus Story within the Johannine Tradition*, 145.

⁴⁴ Carol Meyers, ed., *Women in Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 119.

beyond tradition to engage with the might and power of Jesus as displayed through the resurrection.

Methodology

Not everyone grieves the same way. Persons like Martha, Mary, and perhaps a Jesus-like figure exist in every congregation including County Line Baptist Church. Here is a personal example. Two elder sisters did everything together. One morning as the youngest of the two siblings went for a walk, the elder sister noticed time swiftly passing and inquired about her youngest sibling. As the afternoon approached, the eldest sister became worried and started out searching for the youngest sister on their shared property. Worried, she finds her sister lying in a nearby property, dead. Later, during a round-table discussion about grief at the church, a minister asked a group of ladies if they would like an opportunity to discuss this loss, assuming this eldest sister would want to share. She remained silent. Instead, another sibling in the family, who did not have near the relationship with the youngest sibling appeared to take the loss harder than anyone else in the family. Assumptions can be prejudged on how and who would be affected by a loss of a loved one. One can never know who and to what extent someone experiences loss. This is a reminder that everyone grieves differently.

Several practical insights from John chapter eleven can shape how the women at County Line Baptist Church experience grief. The tools gleaned from this chapter will help the African American women of the church process grief. Pastoral care and personal experience of grief work can lead to the discovery that first allowing oneself to grieve and grieve in the manner that helps the mourner to find comfort is essential. Also, being

rooted in a strong faith in God will enable one to feel that grieving is okay even at times when it feels scary or uncomfortable. The hope in God is that one day their loved one will be seen again.

Application 1: There is Healing Found in Lament

From the examples shown from scripture, the process of lament is powerful. There is cathartic relief in shedding tears due to sorrow, pain, hardship, and grief. Crying can help individuals relieve their built-up emotions that naturally follow the loss of a loved one. Lamenting can be the beginning of a process that is necessary after any loss. This practice can be beneficial if chosen as a tool to assist with grieving.

Application 2: Prayer Is Essential

Before Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, he prays. He leans on his communion with God the Father. Again, the text does not show Jesus using customs of the Jewish community, such as the death wailing or using mourners to show his grief. On several occasions in the New Testament, Jesus tells mourners to stop their crying (Mk. 5:40, Lk. 7:13). In verses forty-one through forty-two, Jesus humbles himself and prays to God so that those who mourn professionally—after suffering the death of a loved one—or the Jews would see that he has power over death. As seen in the biblical text, one may cry, one may pray, and one may desire to be around others. But on the other hand, one may want to be alone and want to sit in silence. As Paul states, “and where one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member is honored, all the members rejoice

with it” (1 Cor. 12:26). Providing a safe place with community support for the women of County Line to grieve as they see fit is necessary.

Application 3: Jesus Brings Hope

With every season of grief comes a fresh opportunity to refocus hearts on the power of the resurrected Christ. In the text, Jesus states to Martha that “I am the Resurrection of Life.” Jesus has control over life, death, and resurrection. Although Martha perhaps fails to know Jesus’ meaning, Jesus provides hope to the onlookers in that life with him is eternal. This is key for persons who experience the death of a loved one to know that for their loved ones to live eternally with Christ their loved ones first must believe. Establishing or re-establishing one’s relationship with Christ can help the unbelief of the meaning of death.

This chapter discusses how the characters in the text of John chapter eleven model grief after their loss in verses seventeen through forty-four. This chapter considers how death is perceived in the New Testament, along with a few examples in the Old Testament readings. The grief that sisters Mary and Martha experience is like the grief experienced by those in the context of this project. The chapter also explains Jesus’ reaction to the death of his beloved friend Lazarus, and how Jesus’ view on death differs from those in the biblical text. His perspective on death brings hope to the situation.

The significance of the exploration of the above constructs is that Jesus was radical in his approach to grief and death. Though he was moved with active compassion for those experiencing grief, he knew that he held power over death. He exerted his influence over death, establishing that he is the resurrection. Also, he showed that

resurrection begins when he authorizes it. Persons did not hear of this type of power that Jesus displays with the resurrection of Lazarus at the time. Jesus takes a tragic situation and rewrites history so that believers in that time and in the future would know that Jesus is life. In addition, it is in his power to give life—today and eternally.

With this knowledge of the true meaning of this text, persons who suffer losses of someone or something dear to them can realize there is life after death. For the believer, understanding that Jesus is the resurrection of life means that death is not final. Jesus has all authority over death. Those who believe in Jesus will never die. Mourners can have hope that their loved ones live on eternally with Christ. This can encourage those who experience grief.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

In March 2020, the world was plagued with a global pandemic. Hundreds of thousands of lives were lost in the United States, alone. As a result of the pandemic, persons experienced multiple levels of grief. Ironically, the global pandemic of 2020 is not the first of its kind. This historical foundation chapter is designed to highlight the impact of grief within a community.

The research will focus on The Black Plague of Europe. Various topics will be discussed that relate to loss and how the church responded to the loss. It will also address the topic of human grief and suffering because of The Black Plague. Furthermore, the reader grasps the concept of how to address grief during a community of loss where there are multiple deaths. Other relevant topics such as burial practices, purging, atonement, panic, fear, violence, and flight will all be addressed as ways of coping with loss. Finally, the project research will compare the responses of loss in the communities affected by plague to the communities in the ministry context.

The European countries France, Spain, and Germany endured massive loss when affected by the Black Death also known as the Black Plague of 1347. It was easily one of the most detrimental plagues in Europe to date. The unexpected spread of sickness with symptoms exhibiting several different plagues hence the origin of its name, seemed to

come overnight, claiming millions of lives, loss of employment, family units disrupted, and change of normalcy.

Herbert Birdwood's letter to the editor of the *Times*, dated August 12, 1899, on The Bubonic Plague [exclaims it] would be the most terrifying pandemic to strike Europe.¹ The Black Plague never again caused that level of fatality over whole countries, but it continued to levy death tolls of similar proportions in individual towns and cities. Furthermore, mortalities of this kind were achieved in a very short space of time, usually within six months, between June and December. There can be no question about the scale of the crisis caused by this plague.² It left no person or institution unaffected. Therefore, how did the Black Plague impact the Roman Catholic Church and community? With such a tragic occurrence, it is important to pull the facts and details from such an historically researched pandemic in efforts to utilize effective implementations that can be adapted to deal with loss and grief experienced by the context community, even on a smaller scale. In the ministry context represented in this doctoral project, the church and its members are made up of a community. Many of the church members not only fellowship together but live with or near each other. The communities affected by the historical Black Plague is liken to modern day mass shootings at a targeted school, church, or synagogue that have taken place in the twentieth century United States. Not just individuals are affected by loss, but on a larger scale, the community can be as well.

¹ Myron Echenberg, *Plague Ports: The Global Urban Impact of Bubonic Plague, 1894-1901* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2007), ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=865376>.

² Paul Slack, "Responses to Plague in Early Modern Europe: The Implications of Public Health," *Social Research* 55, no. 3 (1988): 434, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40970513>.

The Church Responds to the Plague

Black Death was a tornado. It destroyed whatever it touched, especially enclosed and populated facilities like prisons and live-in religious communities.

By the middle of the 14th century, the largest cities of Europe were Paris, Florence, Venice, and Genoa. These were cities with populations in excess of 100,000 people. London, Ghent, Milan, Bologna, Rome, Naples, and Cologne all had around 50,000 people. Smaller cities such as Bordeaux, Toulouse, Marseilles, Barcelona, Seville, and Toledo contain 20 to 50,000 souls. The plague raged through all these cities killing anywhere between thirty and sixty percent of its population.³

Writers often talk about the devastation that was all around the Europeans. One English chronicler, Thomas Walsingham, noted how this “great mortality” transformed the known world:

Towns once packed with people were emptied of their inhabitants, and the plague spread so thickly that the living were hardly able to bury the dead. The spread of sickness invoked fear that led the residents of this area to flee from their businesses and homes to escape what was thought to be “The judgement of God.” Many people in Europe and Asian countries fled to Russia to escape death. “Lithuania expanded its territories dramatically in the 2nd third of the 14th century.”⁴

Very similar to today’s COVID-19, scientists later found that “bacillus travels from person to person through the air” as well as through the bloodstream but with little technology in the 1300’s physicians did not know this; therefore, citizens lacked this knowledge as well.⁵ What they did know was that they were witnessing streets and neighborhoods of people dying daily due to an airborne disease. The big question is how

³ Steven Kreis, "Satan Triumphant: The Black Death," Historyguide.org, <http://historyguide.org/ancient/lecture29b.html>link.

⁴ Sean Martin, *The Black Death* (Harpender, Herts: Oldcastle Books, 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=1121198>.

⁵ Giovanni Boccaccio, "The Decameron, First Day, Introduction," Harvard University, last modified 1906, <https://chaucer.fas.harvard.edu/pages/decameron-first-day-introduction>.

did people in Europe and Asia respond to such a calamity? Inhabitants panicked, became depressed, violent, and scornful.

Meanwhile, in a panic, healthy people did all they could to avoid the sick. Doctors refused to see patients; priests refused to administer last rites; and shopkeepers closed their stores. Many people fled the cities for the countryside, but even there they could not escape the disease: It affected cows, sheep, goats, pigs and chickens as well as people. In fact, so many sheep died that one of the consequences of the Black Death was a European wool shortage. And many people, desperate to save themselves, even abandoned their sick and dying loved ones.⁶

The Pope conducted processions and revivals that lasted for several days. Several thousands of people would pray, wail, and mourn as they cried out to The Virgin Mary. Their hope was that her mercy would cause the suffering to stop. The people believed that they were being punished severely and that they needed to cleanse themselves of great “pestilence.”⁷ Even after holding such processions the people grew weary of prayer. “Efforts to cope with the plague were fruitless. Both the treatment and prevention offered little in the way of immunity, cure, or hope ... each victim's fate was in the hands of God alone.”⁸ This was a great sign of the dependence on God, after what the laity could only see as a failure of the church. Many people turned to the church to plead for the suffering to stop. This same plea happens today when someone is experiencing a painful loss, so they lean on their faith or in some cases turn against it.

⁶ History.com, "Black Death," History.com, last modified 2010, <https://www.history.com/topics/middle-ages/Black-death#:~:text=The%20Black%20Death%20was%20a,the%20Sicilian%20port%20of%20>.

⁷ History.com, "Black Death," <https://www.history.com/topics/middle-ages/Black-death#:~:text=The%20Black%20Death%20was%20a,the%20Sicilian%20port%20of%20>.

⁸ Kreis, "Satan Triumphant," <http://www.historyguide.org/ancient/lecture29b.html>.

Human Loss, Grief and Suffering

The Black Plague was so contagious individuals were fearful of catching the disease regardless of whether it was by casual and in close proximity. The individuals who lived through the Black Plague undoubtedly experienced multiple family members dying. The death rates in the regions were unpredictable and varied from country to country. "Deaths were erratic and ranged from twenty percent to one hundred percent. What can be agreed upon by the historians is that many individuals died. For the area extending from India to Iceland, it can be assumed that between thirty and thirty-five percent of Europe's population disappeared in the three years between 1347 and 1350. This meant about 20 million deaths out of an estimated population of 70 million."⁹ The impact of the loss can be devastating along with having to face that loss more than once, repeatedly like a domino effect.

Some cathedrals' chapters were close to being wiped out, and many abbeys were similarly devastated, even though these were privileged precincts. Almost half the diocesan clergy had died during the first plague, and recurring epidemics continued to dwindle the clerical population and prevent it from effectively answering the religious needs of the European Christian population.¹⁰

When one experiences a loss, that loss can have a ripple effect and permeated to others. This reaction is common within family structures and church congregations. The loss was so paramount in these European communities that if an individual were not directly affected by a loss, they were not far from it. "When the Black Death struck Europe, however, both the Church and its clergy were found wanting in the eyes of European

⁹ History.com, "Black Death," <https://www.history.com/topics/middle-ages/Black-death#:~:text=The%20Black%20Death%20was%20a,the%20Sicilian%20port%20of%20>

¹⁰ McLaurine H. Zentner, "The Black Death and Its Impact on the Church and Popular Religion," University of Mississippi, 5-6, https://egrove.olemiss.edu/hon_thesis/682.

Christians. The significant reduction in the ecclesiastical population, combined with the deterioration in quality of clerical services, created an untrustworthy image of the church in the minds of medieval Christians.”¹¹

People were buried without ceremonies nor headstones to chronologically mark the passing of loved ones. Consequently, making it impossible for a family member to later visit their “grave site” and grieve their loved ones’ death. It is safe to assume that these years were dark for the majority of those that stayed and that left the country. The normal custom for grieving can include funerals, body viewings, and an extensive grieving process. Families were robbed of the normal rituals to grieve and heal during this era. For individuals that were impacted by this new way of burying loved one, this must have added to the already painful experience.

Traditionally, during a funeral, the women would gather inside the house and wail their laments, while the men would gather outside with the priest to carry the body to the church requested by the deceased in their will. However, with the pestilence raging so furiously, these arrangements were soon dropped. Most died without a crowd of mourning women; most would-be mourners were either dead or out getting drunk, which was good for the health of the women, who did not have to go near a corpse or mix with others. Most biers were not carried by friends and neighbours, but by the desperate becchini, who hired themselves out for such awful tasks, and would carry the body, not to the church of the deceased’s choice, but to whichever one was nearest to hand, with four or six priests in front carrying possibly a candle or two; nor did the priests bother to conduct too long and solemn a funeral service, and with the help of the becchini hastily dumped the body in the first open grave they could find.¹²

The response of the people that experienced these gloom-filled misfortunes epitomizes the effects that took a toll on the victims’ mental state of mind. Due to the spread of the pandemic normal gathering and services held to provide closure and start the grief

¹¹ Zentner, "The Black Death and Its Impact on the Church and Popular Religion," 5-6.

¹² Martin, *The Black Death*, 41, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=1121198>.

process was not allowed in this climate. “During the Black Death, people were constantly reminded that their lives could end at any moment because of the speed at which the plague killed. Historian Robert S. Gottfried explains that the Black Death, “that sudden, precipitous, painful, and omnipresent killer, intensified the medieval preoccupation with death, judgment, heaven and hell.”¹³

Addressing Grief During the Black Plague

During what seemed to be such a hopeless era, many leaned on faith to carry them through the pandemic. Clergyman, nuns, and monks were greatly affected by the Black Plague; negating those that died, many chose to flee to other areas within the country and out of the country. No one was exempt from contracting this terrible disease. Some spiritual leaders hid away waiting for the terror of the plague to end, but some chose to give in person guidance, counseling, and consolation to the people who were open to receiving it. For many believers, having the counsel of a clergy was welcomed and to imagine not to have that opportunity to speak to a spiritual guide during a time of hardship, could have caused more grief. In the midst of their crisis and so much loss, people resorted to a lot of prayer and devotional measures.

Christopher Macklin states in his writing “Stability and change in the composition of a ‘Plague Mass’ in the wake of the Black Death” in the mid-fourteenth century the Black Death inflicted one of the most devastating losses of life in human history.¹⁴ The

¹³ Zentner, "The Black Death and Its Impact on the Church and Popular Religion," 5-6.

¹⁴ Christopher Macklin, “Stability and Change in the Composition of a 'Plague Mass' in the Wake of the Black Death,” *Plain-song and Medieval Music* 25, no. 2 (10): 167-189, <http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest.com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/docview/1828890924?accountid=202487>.

church stepped in as best it could to offer support and encouragement through the crisis. Places of worship have been the key for centuries to provide strength to those experiencing difficult times. The church of the fourteenth century is no different than the Black churches that have opened its doors through times of struggles such as slavery, Jim Crow Laws, Civil Rights, and Civil Unrest. Individuals have found comfort during trying times to gather with other Christians, to sing hymns, recite scripture, and bow for prayers. Macklin mentions that there is "something" about Christians collectively coming together for such practices listed above, which I would identify as the Holy Spirit ministering to his people. This is still true in many Black churches with “homegoing” or funeral services of a loved one. The coming together with each other was to celebrate the deceased and comfort and support those left behind. Other elements or rituals often seen in an African American funeral that helps with the grieving process include extravagant final arrangements, long funeral services, many songs, reading of resolutions and sympathy cards, and printed creative programs. All these elements helped remaining loved ones began the grieving process of the death of their loved one.¹⁵

Exercises of collective piety, such as the singing of psalms and the celebration of special votive (lighting candles) masses, encouraged social cohesion in the face of the tragedy that occurred in churches during the Black Plague. It is demonstrated in Macklin’s article that the chant used in the Mass entitled “*Missa pro mortalitate subitanea evitanda*” (the Mass to avoid sudden death) argue that the music of the Mass had untapped value by which the chant was chosen and performed during a socially stressful time. As music was used during the Plague Mass, singing of songs and hymns

¹⁵ Arlen Churn, *The End Is Just the Beginning: Lessons in Grieving for African Americans* (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 2003), 9.

not only can be a form of worship and communication to God, but a way to connect in our inner self in times of mourning. Feelings revealed in music are essentially that we may grasp, realize, comprehend our feelings without pretending to have them or imputing them to anyone else.¹⁶ Chanting psalms, prayers, singing, proclaiming God's Word, and lighting of candles were all done in a collective act as the congregation came together on one accord in unison to ward off the disease and protect themselves from the sorrow that the terrible disease brought.

The community masses increased in numbers as the pandemic affected the communities. There is belief that there is strength in numbers. To one who is grieving to have a support system to lean on, cry with, and even celebrate with during times of loss is vital. Since the community mass practice was widespread, many individuals were dealing with repenting for actions and dealing with the loss of their family members at the same time. It is important to process grief, even when you, known to have strong faith, are emotionally weak while experiencing grief during a pandemic. "These rituals and sacramental services were important because they allowed the church to help calm the fear of death among European Christians, but priests struggled to perform them effectively in the wake of the plague."¹⁷

New Burial Practices

There were not enough graves to hold the amount of people that died in Europe and Asia; therefore, it was normal for citizens to see piles of deceased brethren lining the

¹⁶ Chava Sekeles, "Music Therapy: Death and Grief," ProQuest, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/reader.action?docID=3117639&ppg=89>.

¹⁷ Zentner, "The Black Death and Its Impact on the Church and Popular Religion," 9.

streets of their villages. In large and densely populated towns of Europe, special plague cemeteries were established, which contained single graves, multiple graves, and mass graves.¹⁸ Imagine how difficult it was to record such a travesty accurately? However, analysts were able to keep a record of most of the remains. Grave sites were not prepared for such an overwhelming response. The demand for those in the funeral business heightened drastically. The mortality rate increased expeditiously which caused the “death care” industries to become understaffed and lacked the time and or energy to exhibit empathy to those experiencing loss. It is assumed that people did not want to work during such a chaotic time especially in a field that emphasized the reality. Companies were tasked to cope and create solutions for this influx of corpses.

A single graveyard received more than 11,000 corpses in six weeks. “There was a fear of transmission of disease from corpses and local administrations punished those who hid the sick. The dead became an overwhelming crisis, since towns and communities had difficulty dealing with the large numbers of dead or even the expense of digging their graves. The diminishing number of clergy meant that it was more difficult to offer the dead a proper burial. The numerous corpses ended up being treated no better than goat carcasses.”¹⁹

Purging and Atonement

It is imperative to note that Europeans, especially in this period, were immersed in the Catholic faith. Thus, they assumed that the “Black Plague” they were experiencing was the wrath of God due to the multitude of sins committed by society such as worldliness, heresy, sexual immorality, blasphemy, and the list goes on. Using this

¹⁸ Per Lagerås, ed., *Environment, Society and the Black Death: An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Late-Medieval Crisis in Sweden* (Havertown, PA: Oxbow Books, Limited, 2016), 115.

¹⁹ Uli Schamiloglu, “The Impact of the Black Death on the Golden Horde: Politics, Economy, Society, Civilization,” *Directory of Open Access Journal*, last modified June 1, 2017, <https://doaj.org/article/e70dbdfe3e624f5d960a759401895ced>.

sylllogism, the only cure for God's wrath was from repentance, purging, and atonement.

"By this logic, the only way to overcome the plague was to win God's forgiveness. Some people believed that the way to do this was to purge their communities of heretics and other troublemakers—so, for example, many thousands of Jews were massacred in 1348 and 1349."²⁰

Two aftermaths of the Black Death on the continent of Europe, which had little impact on England, were the persecution of the Jews and the cult of the Flagellants. In France and Germany many Jews, under torture, confessed to poisoning wells or anointing doors with plague poison and were burnt alive; the accusations were often made by their debtors. In a few towns the authorities made half-hearted attempts to stop the massacre, but Christians who tried to save their Jewish friends were tortured and killed along with them. Nohl comments on the situation "The massacre of the Jews in the fourteenth century are so deeply revolting, because the ruling classes, as well as the clergy and the educated classes of that time, were perfectly conscious of the lack of foundation in the accusations brought by the people against the Jews; but from fear of the rabble and still more for the sake of material profit, not only held their peace but in the most cruel manner participated in the slaughter of the innocent victims!"²¹

Individuals can be afraid when they feel like they cannot control the event. Fear can cause all types of behavior even murder. The Jews were not the only inhabitants that suffered from violence. A group of men from Germany rallied together in desperation of fear and suffering from unsurmountable losses and formed what many would call a "cult." The Flagellants, a religious sect, traveled from town to town imitating the painful, bloody death of Jesus Christ with self-inflicting wounds. They believed that if they performed these acts along with forsaking bed, bath, and sex for thirty-three days (representing Jesus' life on Earth), that God would ward off the dreadful disease. Instead of the town residents flocking to the church, they followed the flagellants believing they

²⁰ Kreis, "Satan Triumphant," <http://www.historyguide.org/ancient/lecture29b.html>.

²¹ A. W. Slone, "The Black Death in England," *South African Medical Journal* 59, no. 18 (April 1981), https://hdl.handle.net/10520/AJA20785135_13783.

could ward off the disease. They were an alternative to the dissipating organized church that was known for dependable, experienced clergy. As the rampant spread of the pandemic ran its course, flagellants were welcomed. These groups arrived with self-proclaimed leaders who led the laity in their religious routine of “religious hymns ... in ritualistic dancing, and denounced themselves for their past sins.”²² They entered towns and held court in the public square with “the disciplined nature of early flagellant groups ... offered a feeling of structure during such a chaotic period,” filling the gap of the delinquent church.²³

The laity needed to ensure their salvation, and there was not any confidence in the church with clergy who either unfortunately, died, fled, or were inexperienced due to the quick ordination of underaged men to fulfill vacant or vacated leadership positions. “These flagellants believed that they were receiving divine revelations from God, and that they were chosen to prepare the world for God’s judgement when the church could not.”²⁴ This “cult” following provided some hope to those who felt loss and needed to feel that they belonged to something that could bring about change. Many individuals did not know what to do, so they did anything. Joining constructive movements to deal with grief is a great idea to use all those negative feelings that derive from death constructively. Many community members can relate to each other, thus creating an atmosphere for healing. Joining the flagellants may have not been the best form of action

²² Zentner, "The Black Death and Its Impact on the Church and Popular Religion," 26.

²³ Zentner, "The Black Death and Its Impact on the Church and Popular Religion," 9.

²⁴ Zentner, "The Black Death and Its Impact on the Church and Popular Religion," 39.

to take to deal with one's loss, but these men and women found comrades with others who had similar losses and could identify with each other's pain.

Panic, Fear, and Flight

The spread of sickness invoked fear that led the residents of the area to flee from their businesses and homes to escape what was thought to be "The judgement of God." Many people in Europe and Asian countries fled to Russia to escape death. "Lithuania expanded its territories dramatically in the 2nd third of the 14th century."²⁵ What they did know was that they were witnessing streets and neighborhoods of people dying daily. The big question is how did people in Europe and Asia respond to such a calamity?

Inhabitants panicked, became depressed, violent, and scornful.

Meanwhile, in a panic, healthy people did all they could to avoid the sick. Doctors refused to see patients; priests refused to administer last rites; and shopkeepers closed their stores. Many people fled the cities for the countryside, but even there they could not escape the disease: It affected cows, sheep, goats, pigs and chickens as well as people. In fact, so many sheep died that one of the consequences of the Black Death was a European wool shortage. And many people, desperate to save themselves, even abandoned their sick and dying loved ones.²⁶

²⁵ Martin, *The Black Death*, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=1121198>.

²⁶ History.com, "Black Death," <https://www.history.com/topics/middle-ages/Black-death#:~:text=The%20Black%20Death%20was%20a,the%20Sicilian%20port%20of%20>

Violence

Artists often painted images that reflect death as that is all that was experienced in the land.²⁷ Yet with death, came violence and murder of a different animal when Jews were blamed for bringing the plague as retribution for the death of Jesus Christ. Non-Jewish inhabitants went so far as to poison the water sources of European Jews. Many found ways, not always acceptable by others, to cope with loss. This leads into the second way that Europeans began to cope with the reality of the Bubonic plague, violence.

European Christians bubbled over with frustration. They knew that it would be futile to direct their anger towards God, so they chose another focus. The lack of information about the Bubonic plague led them to assumptions. When one experiences loss or even multiple losses, it can cause one to question “why.” This is a normal response to loss. The Christians assumed that the cause of such a tragedy was due to the “cursing” of the Jews. They believed that because they killed Jesus Christ, God was punishing all that lived remotely close to the “murders of Christ.” Therefore, violence broke out in the streets of France. Many Jews were burned to death in bonfires.

Kreis, a historical scholar, proclaimed that Jews were considered to be eternal strangers.

He was the outsider who willingly separated himself from the Christian world. Why did this occur? According to the Church, the Jews had rejected Jesus as their savior -- they refused to accept the Gospel in place of Mosaic law. In the early 4th century, the Church denied Jews their civil rights. But the Jews maintained a role in medieval society as moneylenders. They were excluded from all crafts and

²⁷ Kriston Rennie, “Black Death: How Medieval Writers Described the Pandemic of Their Time, What Do They Tell Us About How COVID-19 is Being Dealt With?” *National Interest*, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/Black-death-how-medieval-writers-described-pandemic-their-time-139352>.

trades. There was also the belief that Jews often performed the ritual murder of Christians, in order to re-enact the Crucifixion.²⁸

Clearly there was already separation within the European Christian community, but the encumbrance of the plague drove a deeper wedge between Christians and Jews.

The disconnect between Jews and the Christian community reflected in the European laws that restricted Jews from having the same opportunities as other Christians. European Jews were not able to intermarry with Christians, accept Christian servitude, build new churches, or conduct an extensive list of businesses. The guilt and grief that the community shared did not extend towards the Jews. "Coupled with the plague, the persecution of the Jews nearly wiped-out entire communities. In all, sixty large and 150 smaller Jewish communities were exterminated. Between 1347 and 1351, there were recorded more than 350 massacres which ultimately led to permanent shifts of the Jewish population into Poland and Lithuania."²⁹

Grief in Modern Times

Just as the Black Plague affected Europe, there are families and communities directly and indirectly forced to face similar losses in modern times. The bereavement processes are not optional but a by-product of losses. Gottfried explains that personal grief experiences are interdependent on the family dynamic. When death occurs in a family, the physical effects mimic a feeling of being torn internally. Family systems are vital in the role it plays in the grief process, but what happens when the family is attacked with loss directly. If loss occurs within the family, individuals of the family may sense

²⁸ Kreis, "Satan Triumphant," <http://www.historyguide.org/ancient/lecture29b.html>.

²⁹ Kreis, "Satan Triumphant," <http://www.historyguide.org/ancient/lecture29b.html>.

physical dislocation and lostness. It is the end of routines for caregivers, an abrupt change in finances when the breadwinner passes, and the end of familial relationships. This is precisely what victims of the Black Plague experienced and is often seen in the historical County Line Baptist Church family. Some families within the ministry context experienced similarly high levels of losses throughout the year that made some of the ministry members feel all alone.

Many of the members of this Goochland, Virginia church are related to each other on the maternal and paternal sides of their families. When a church member dies more than likely it impacts both sides of the descendants' family, church family, and the community in which they live. So, within the church, several families are experiencing some type of loss. As with the families in Europe during the plague, survivors remained to face primary and secondary losses. When a family grieves, a barrage of different emotions, reactions, and coping mechanisms will emerge. Healing is necessary for all those involved. Unlike the era of the Black Plague, people in modern times may not be robbed of the opportunity to grieve via visitations, ceremonies, and burial rituals, but how grief is addressed as a family or individually within a family can differ.

For example, at County Line Baptist Church, Family A, at the beginning of the year, experienced the traumatic death of their family patriarch. Within two months, the mother died from a sudden illness. As Family A grieves the loss of two family members, the remaining breadwinner for the family receives the diagnosis of breast cancer. The pastoral team offered as much grief support as the family allowed, but the family reassured the pastoral team that the family was doing "okay." It was questionable after

several losses experienced in one year, how it was possible for the family unit and church family to be “okay”?

With time, Family A came together and leaned on each other for support. The church pulled together to visit the family to provide support as well. The pastoral team called and made visits to encourage the family. The family was visibly absent from the church for a few weeks, which is normal after losing a loved one, but the church did not want the family to feel like they were all alone. Then after a few calls, not just from the pastor, the family members slowly returned to church and shortly thereafter they began to get back involved in worship services. Some of the family members were angry that suspected church members did not reach out to them as they thought. Everyone deals with death differently, and those you think should be there may and may not be present. The church family as support provides encouragement and participate in the acts of worship. The church family becomes an extended family and can become part of the healing process that is much needed during a loss. As during the Black Plaque, Christians coming together to support one another and worship God in hard times has great benefits to the loss that was felt.

When death occurs in the family, the family structure that was once known is no longer present. Everyone in the family must navigate a new family structure and roles. In another example, when the patriarch of a family died in the early 1980s, the mother took on the new role of provider for the remaining family members. Not only did that mother have to learn the responsibilities of a new role, so did the children. Every holiday, birthday, anniversary, and every day in between, no longer seemed the same. The chair that was once occupied at the head of the table remained empty. The car that was once

driven by the father now sat in the driveway. The father's voice no longer whispered goodnight to the children. When a member of a family dies, the entire family must navigate the new roles being experienced. As the community, church, and families came together to lean on each other through difficult times, it is necessary today due to the loss in the family, church family a community as during the Black Plague.

Methodology

Application 1: Getting Involved

Some European communities chose to participate in society and religious groups such as the flagellants. Although this group's behavior seemed radical to many, there could be an argument that belonging to such a group was beneficial to many. There are benefits in feeling that one "belongs" to a movement. This broad perspective can be utilized by allowing the women of the church to participant in a support group or non-profit organization. There are many service opportunities within these group (i.e., MADD, Mothers of the Movement, widowed spouses) involvement to cope with the many losses individuals experience. Also, coping with grief through community service may allow them to find companionship and friends of common interest. The women of County Line Baptist Church can join non-profit organizations that are composed of members of similar likes and experiences to help them process grief and adapt to the different stages of loss, which will allow healing to begin.

Application 2 - Collective Worship-Celebration of Life

When considering a curriculum for grief ministry, it must be approached from a holistic perspective. As a collective body during the Black Plague, there were Plague Masses with the singing of psalms, lighting of candles, and praying. Singing of hymns, quoting of scriptures, encouraging spoken words, and offering prayers has always been a form of worship, but also seen as a form of surrendering the issue to God. The same is easily transferable in modern times. The church community of County Line Baptist Church can come together and worship and support the survivor in a time of celebration, support, and remembrance of their loved one's life. This is important to assist the survivors in a completely holistic approach in the grief process.

Conclusion

The Black Plague was an inescapable storm that claimed millions of European lives. During the 1300s, families, economies, and homes were devastated due to the high death rate that stemmed from the plague. The fear stemming from this pandemic caused people to cling to what was left of the church, being consoled with singing of hymns praying at plague Mass and pivoting to new burial rituals with mass burials being the norm. The overwhelming amount of death and the lack of time to grieve was difficult to manage. Grief became an abstract concept leaving citizens to grow numb to the overbearing amount of pain and loss that they experienced in the community.

It is interesting to see how quickly the survivors of the Black Plague re-populated while never forgetting the turmoil that they experienced for generations to come. The women of County Line Baptist Church can use some information from this study as an

example of coping mechanisms that need to be avoided. However, a couple of concepts that can be taken from this study is that community worship and participating in groups or organizations that promote healing to occur. When one is surrounded by people of similar experiences, the stages of grief that are required to heal become palatable.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The theological foundation laid out in this chapter for a grief curriculum is for the congregant pool of women from the predominantly African American church, County Line Baptist Church. The participants for this ministry are part of the 300 plus membership founded during the Reconstruction Period in 1867. This congregation has a long history in a rural county. A history of births, a myriad of life experiences that include baptisms, graduations, weddings, and the inevitable deaths have occurred. The church is losing its members throughout the year. This makes the many losses hard because they affect a few families in a congregation composed of a concentration of related families. This chapter will focus on how grief can be addressed using the Theology of Grief and using Womanist Theology as an approach to facilitate this African American woman support group.

To minister to the mourning, as a theologian that ministers in a traditional, historic, Black Baptist congregation that has not had an organized and operational grief ministry since its founding, what theological template does one stand on, expose, questions, or even dialogue with, to heal the grief-stricken? Beyond knowing what it feels like to experience a season of death to provide counseling to others, is it enough that you have been in a mourner's shoes? Is it good enough to dispense the biblically appropriate scriptures, pray prayers, and recommend hymns or gospel songs of comfort? Or are you

simply going to gloss over the arduous grief journey and present a simplistic sympathy card version? You see, all of us have experienced the death of a loved one (familial, friend, or coworker) and have heard other people share their accounts of how death has affected their lives. However, how many of us have died and come back weeks, months, or years later to share the experience? There is no living model on earth that can comfort us with the schematics of death that will bring an understanding and comfort when a loved one transitions.

The creation of a functioning, relevant grief ministry takes knowing the Christian anthropological framework of death and dying. Offering grief counseling takes the assembly of a profound, digestible exigency of what Christian death entails and how one climbs out of grief. It is imperative to dispense information akin to being a Christian that begins, ties together, and ends with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He is the one that sits with us equally on mountaintops as he does in our valleys. Born of a woman, having lived a human experience and a physical death (three elements all mortals must also traverse), Jesus will forever be a supernatural being who concord death, burial, and the grave. He is our Christian model for life and death. “Jesus was human and from the beginning committed to live the human experience.”¹

We as believers know the power of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in good times when all is well. Yet, when dealing with challenges, particularly grief, many are blinded and overwhelmed by the emotions of death and forget the power of God, which is the power we also possess to heal. Instead, we allow that emotion to envelop us and cause us to crawl down a hole (albeit our loved ones’ graves), self-medicate with a

¹ Fred B. Craddock, Dale Goldsmith, and Joy V Goldsmith, *Speaking of Dying: Recovering the Church's Voice in the Face of Death* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2012), 57.

drug of choice (i.e., food, alcohol, shopping, etc.), or wallow in the pain from unresolved hurts between us and the deceased. A grief ministry can recalibrate our broken, grief-stricken heart, mind, and soul. As the layers of pain, tears, and abusive behavior are peeled away, we are gently reminded that the same power that rose Jesus from the grave is the same power we can harness. This power can dissipate grief when mourning extends beyond the freshness of a loved one's death into months, years, and decades. In other words, Jesus is the giver of hope and purpose when we feel all hope and purpose is gone. "Jesus' purpose was driven by what Christians believed was his assignment from God: to be anointed, chosen to be God's agent. In other words, to be Christ/Messiah."² As our Christ, he embodies what he gives, comfort and peace when life's challenges (especially the challenge of grief) weigh us down emotionally and physically.

Grief is definable. Yet it is like a "long valley, a winding valley where any bend may reveal a totally new landscape."³ The emotions it evokes can leave you without words. It is "the primarily emotional/affective process of reacting to the loss of a loved one through death." Grief can cause both emotional and physical reactions. As a result, one may want to numb the loss in unhealthy ways. Yet, our Lord God offers the ultimate comfort "As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem" (Is. 66:13). The ground from which this grief ministry will be built is the Theology of Death cornerstone. A biblical study of death by noted scholars will offer the structure to comprehend death along with the following three subcategory cornerstones:

² Craddock, *Speaking of Dying*, 62.

³ C. S. Lewis, *Grief Observed* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 2001), 60.

1) Christian Anthropology (death and mourning), 2) Eschatology: The Hope of Resurrection, and 3) Ecclesiology: The Rituals of Mourning.

The Theology of Death

For the Christian faith, the Bible is the blueprint. It speaks on a plethora of conditions, people, places, events, namely, the beginning and the end. We who believe could recite the introductory chapters to Genesis, namely the creation of the world and the first man and woman, Adam, and Eve. Yet somehow, we may not have enough scriptures and comprehension in our emotional arsenal to keep us spiritually grounded when it comes to healing from grief. As Children of God, we are equipped to follow his lead and live accordingly. As Christians, we should never have doubt to follow his inclinations and not our own. However, if we go astray, there is always a route back to where we belong:

The Christian narrative is unique. Briefly stated, it is that God created the universe and all that is in it, including people, and that all that was created was good, really and truly good (Gen. 1:31 points out particularly that we, humans were created “very good”) ... we could accept God and accept our dependence on him and our connection with other humans, or we could formulate a different plan and try to live a different story and create our own plot.⁴

As humans, we think we have all the answers and do not ever need any help. Culturally speaking, Black Americans are not the most therapy-savvy people when it comes to seeking help to keep their mental health in check. If we believe as Christians that God the Father sent his Son to save us and the entire world, we will not have a problem with seeking help for all issues first by investigating the Word.

⁴ Lewis, *Grief Observed*, 89.

Therefore, the Word should be the first place to go for emotional assistance when grieving. As believers, our faith, hope, and purpose for being are all rooted in the Christian lifestyle powered by the Trinity. “We Christians are called by God and given the gifts of faith in God, hope in Christ, and a love for one another. The structures, ministries, and disciplines of the Christian community are gifts of God provided to assist us in our discipline and our growth in the faith.”⁵ As Christians, we are not born ready-made and packaged to walk the walk and talk the talk. As humans, we are born in a mortal experience and live and grow our faith as believers to become Christ-like.

Now, our model of the one who lived as a man with supernatural powers does not mean we too will walk on water and turn water into wine. Our faith walk is deeper than that. We are not supposed to replicate Jesus Christ in all aspects of his thirty-three years. We are meant to replicate his spirit, which fuels our speech, actions, engagement with others, and how we think and feel deep within our psyche where only God can hear. With this comprehension, we can also be without doubt, but we understand to believe in the unknown through faith.

As Christians, one of the significant unknowns is death. As stated earlier, there is no living eyewitness account of how one operates in death. As believers, to have confidence that after a physical death takes place, there is a place where our souls ascend and live with God. It is a mystery that we hope to realize once we have passed from this world because that is what the Bible states. We cannot nor should we make earthly, human sense out of what life is like after death. “Life has more than once failed to make

⁵ Lewis, *Grief Observed*, 98.

sense to God's faithful. The classic examples are Job of the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament."⁶

Job was considered an upstanding God-fearing man, yet he was tested beyond the breaking point of being stripped of earthly possessions and the death of family members. Job is the reason for the phrase "having the patience of Job." He was still faithful and committed to God. Jesus is the ultimate example of commitment to God as one who was chastised and not believed to be the Son of God. His murder became the symbol of God sacrificing his human existence to save humankind for eternity. Such a gift for every Christian believer should give us no pause in knowing how fortunate, at peace, and faithful it is to walk this path without fear of death, only gratitude.

A key tenet of Christian faith is that the crucifixion of the Son of God is a unique death by means of which the powers of sin and death in the world have been conquered so that the future is marked by the promise of the plenitude of life to come in the 'new creation' which will glorify the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit.⁷

Christian Anthropology: Death and Mourning

Mourning represents an outward expression of grief when someone has died. Death is when the bodily functions of a person have ceased to exist. Both terms can conjure imagery that is sorrowful and traumatic. However, what makes them equally tolerant is when we, as Christians, view these two processes as the outward expressions of the Parousia of Christ, the zenith of the Christian's earthly journey. The survivors left to mourn a loved one's passing when they have gone on to be with God the Father, Son,

⁶ Lewis, *Grief Observed*, 101.

⁷ Henry L. Novello, *Death as Transformation: A Contemporary Theology of Death* (London, UK: Routledge, 2011), 1.

and Holy Ghost can be engaged in simultaneously mourning the earthly human loss and welcoming the deceased soul into the kingdom of Christ. The picture of death and mourning becomes much more palatable:

Christ is the Saviour of the world, the One in whom all things hold together and are brought to full flowering. In light of Scripture's testimony that the powers of death in the world have been conquered by Christ's unique death on Calvary, it strikes the author that when our own death is conceived as a dying into Christ who has assumed our death into his death, it is simply inadequate to view death in purely negative or neutral terms; rather, such an 'event' acquires a distinctly positive flavour as the hope of new life out of a situation of death (cf. Rom 4:17, 6:5; Rev 14:13). New life out of the abyss of death means that something transformative happens to the person at death, in which case the traditional Catholic teaching that the person or soul is unaffected by death is challenged by the author, as is the Protestant tendency to ascribe no significance to death because personal existence ceases at the time of death until the Final Judgement when those who belong to Christ will share in the glory of eternal life.⁸

According to the Bible, Jesus does not descriptively belabor the effects of and the culmination of death.

The emphasis on life in the Christian perspective on death is reflected in the fact that Jesus himself had little to say about death. When we look to the Sermon on the Mount, for instance, we find that Jesus' teaching is all about instructions for living; there is not one single instruction with respect to death.⁹

The Bible has over twenty verses on comfort to those who mourn, with Revelations 21:4 often read at Christian funerals that speaks to the erasure of tears, sorrow, pain, and death. It is a foreshadowing of what is to come for all who are expecting a welcoming into the kingdom of God.

The belief in resurrection at death, moreover, not only confers inviolable meaning and worth to the life-time of the deceased, but also brings great consolation to the mourning and grieving because their loved ones are viewed as already sharing in

⁸ Novello, *Death as Transformation: A Contemporary Theology of Death*, 4.

⁹ Novello, *Death as Transformation: A Contemporary Theology of Death*, 111.

Christ's victory over death and enjoying the beatific vision of God in the risen life.¹⁰

Eschatology: Resurrection (The Theology of Hope)

Eschatology is the groundwork for which Christian belief revolves when you examine how this journey is not about being born and living. This Christian journey is about being born again, which is not possible without the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Dr. Jurgen Moltmann, renowned and highly read in this discipline of eschatology, reminds us that this was once “the doctrine of the end... These end events were to break into this world from somewhere beyond history, and to put an end to the history in which all things here live and move.”¹¹

All that we know here stay here, and as believers, our afterlife with God is a mystery we look forward to in gratitude. When we take time to realize that “...the resurrection of humanity is the ultimate fruit of the resurrection of Christ (which is the basis of our hope), and of his glorious Parousia (the definitive manifestation of our hope)”¹² our understanding of how hope operates becomes profound. The template for hope is Jesus, the model sacrificial lamb for humankind. No one has come after him as the updated or latest and greatest version. His resurrection is systematically embodied and reoccurring when each believer dies, passes from this world, and our souls become

¹⁰ Novello, *Death as Transformation: A Contemporary Theology of Death*, 227.

¹¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London, UK: SCM Press, 1967), 15.

¹² Paul O’Callaghan, “The Resurrection of the Dead,” *Christ Our Hope: An Introduction to Eschatology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 74.

resurrected into a new kingdom with the Trinity until the day Jesus comes back to earth and calls his people home.

“When Martha complained to Jesus for having allowed her brother Lazarus to die, and Jesus replied to the effect that he will rise again, she exclaimed: ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day’” (Jn 11:24). “Resurrection seems to have been a commonplace belief.”¹³ As believers, we too should treat the process of resurrection as a commonplace for all of us who aspire to be reunited with loved ones and the Trinity. Yet, the uniting with the Trinity and our loved ones should not be seen with mortal vision and experiences from earth.

As Christians, our life is reflective of Christ-like behavior and, therefore, our thinking about death and the resurrection for all in the afterlife is about transformation and not simply transference of our earthly life in heaven. “Jesus taught that the resurrection would signal a return not to the earthly, corruptible state, but to a transformed, glorified, and permanent one: ‘For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven’ (Mt. 22:30).”¹⁴

Now, even as Christians, if you are of the belief that all believers are intitled to the benefits of infinite hope by resurrection and only *all believers*, you may have to review in the Old Testament what has been reiterated in the New Testament:

The power of God, over creation is unlimited and the salvation won by Christ is destined for all, resurrection will be universal. In John 5:28-29, which is clearly referring to Daniel 12:2 and developing it, we read: “The hour is coming when *all who are in the tombs* will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection

¹³ O’Callaghan, “The Resurrection of the Dead,” 86.

¹⁴ O’Callaghan, “The Resurrection of the Dead,” 87.

of judgment.” Paul, speaking before the pagans, taught the same thing: “there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust” (Acts 24:15).¹⁵

Ecclesiology: Rituals of Mourning

There are protocols in place when it comes to the preparing and funeralizing a human body that crosses religious, cultural, and racial boundaries. The same is true for mourning. There are a plethora of examples pertaining to rituals of mourning, especially as a community when it comes to sharing memories. The deceased is center stage as they are remembered: video presentations of pictures, sharing remembrances via oral history, playing the deceased favorite music, or wearing their favorite color in the attire or corsage during the wake or funeral have become modern-day rituals.

Former president of the National Funeral Directors Association, John Hogan, and other funeral directors began personalizing funerals in the 1970s by asking families for pictures of the deceased. “He noted the changing tone of the funeral homes he grew up in, whose ambiance resonated morbidly, with dark drapes and sorrowful music. Now ... ‘it’s bright ... the wallpaper is yellow, the drapes are all a lighter color. The focus is on life lived and life after rather than death.’”¹⁶ But dare I say that that are no other more iconic and biblically-based examples of a ritual in mourning, in particular an individual in mourning than the expressions of Job as found in the Old Testament. Job 1:20-21 symbolizes a man at the end of his rope, too far gone emotionally. From just reading the account, his anguish is palpable:

¹⁵ O’Callaghan, “The Resurrection of the Dead,” 87.

¹⁶ Denise Carson, “Her Twenty-First-Century Memorial Service, His Twentieth-Century Funeral,” *Parting Ways: New Rituals and Celebrations of Life’s Passing* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 201.

At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."

After the death of his entire household (family, servants, and animals), Job is altered emotionally and physically. He tore his clothing, shaved his head, and descends to the ground. This ritual transforms the Job we know into an unrecognizable being.

There are biblical examples of mourning rituals with the tearing of clothing and wearing sackcloth for many days. We read about Jacob learning of Joseph's death (Gen. 37:34), David and his men learning of Saul and his son Jonathan's deaths (2 Sam. 1:11), and how clothing was immediately taken off. Clothing tore off the body, weeping, and fasting would take place in a minimal time frame. When we dissect the mourning rituals Job entered, there are literal and figurative layers to take off the once prominent man of ancient Near East, whom we come to find early in the book of his namesake that is now a disfigured version of his former self: 1) Job's clothing being torn from his body sheds him of the last of his earthly possessions along with the depletion of his family and animals. Clothing was of value, yet no longer was it of value or of use to Job. Because the wealth Job once amassed was now a loss, he is now no different than:

A great proportion of the population [who] possibly possessed just one garment. Material things lost their usefulness and value once Job's animals, servants, and children were lost. He loses his social status (Num 20:26) as well; he remains at least partially naked, "resulting in public shame" (cf. Job 2:8).¹⁷

Nudity was seen as unclean and akin to being 'dead,' therefore Job was relegated to being lower class in the social system of the day and without any boundaries since he is now literally and figuratively naked. "Nudity means the complete absence of boundaries; the

¹⁷ Richard W. Medina, "Job's Entrée into a Ritual of Mourning as Seen in the Opening Prose of the Book of Job," *Die Welt Des Orients* 38 (2008): 204.

body is accessible to any and every one, thus destroying its exclusivity as something “set apart.” Boundaries must be maintained, and so nudity is unclean.”¹⁸

Job’s shaven head is the antithesis of the time. He had to intentionally shave his head during a time when every man, woman, and child wore their hair long.

Thus, Job’s head-shaving is a rite that symbolizes the loss of his life and, by extension, assimilation of himself to the dead. It also signals Job’s entry into a state of pollution, effects a transition in his status and serves as a public, temporary marker of his change of identity (cf. Num. 6; 5:11-28; 30:2; Deut. 21:10-14).¹⁹

In modern times, such a drastic change in a person’s appearance via a haircut or hair color could signify a positive decision. Some family and friends may see the person trying to move forward and embark on a new season of life after losing a loved one. Others may see this new outward change of appearance as avoidance of the pain felt by grief. This change of appearance for Job was very drastic and beyond the customary mourning rituals during this era.

Job’s descending to the ground is a symbol of bowing, falling prostrate before God, and being one who is dead-like. Despite his loss, Job still worshiped God. Perhaps this physical embodiment of worship with the loss of everything and everyone who valued Job places him right where he is supposed to be. There is nothing else left of value other than God. The omnipresent one has Job’s full attention. Described as a man who “was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil,” (Job 1:1), even in this painful season in life, Job stays the course and still chooses to worship and not curse God.

¹⁸ Medina, “Job’s Entrée into a Ritual of Mourning,” 204.

¹⁹ Medina, “Job’s Entrée into a Ritual of Mourning,” 205.

When Job's three friends arrive to comfort him in his losses, the Bible states the four of them sat in silence for seven days and seven nights (Job 2:13). The timeframe before the seven days is not accounted for, nor is the span of time between the first chapter of Job and chapter forty-two, when God restores Job's losses. Once again, as a reminder, this had to be the most iconic losses, testing of faith, and outward expressions of mourning written in the Bible or the history of literature. Job is the greatest example of the gift of being steadfast to God when all is truly lost.

Womanist Theology as a Model for Grief Support

African American women's issues are often rarely addressed, if addressed at all, compared to other races and genders. The way they grieve could be different from other ethnic groups, but they are important enough to ask what they need to help them process the loss they often feel when a loved one dies. Womanist Theology is used to address the needs of African American women within the context of this project.

African American women are usually inclusive as the theme of books or lectures about race, versus specifically being addressed regarding systematic issues per gender. This curriculum for the grief support group will address the apparent reactions of “numbness and disbelief; anxiety from the distress of separation; a process of mourning often accompanied by symptoms of depression; and eventual recovery.”²⁰

Black women enlisted such terms as “slave of a slave,” or double jeopardy,” to point to what is meant to be an oppressed member of an already oppressed group. With the emerging “womanist consciousness,” Black women began to openly discuss their experiences as Black women and to search for ways in which to gain their freedom without becoming alienated from the Black community as a whole-

²⁰ PDQ Supportive and Palliative Care Editorial Board, “Grief, Bereavement, and Coping with Loss (PDQ®),” Nih.gov (National Center Institute (US), January 13, 2020), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK66052/>.

particularly Black men. It is as part of this developing consciousness of what it means to be Black and woman that Womanist Theology has emerged.²¹

The term ‘womanist’ may get its motivation from the author Alice Walker and her 1983 collection of essays *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*, but the “roots of Womanist Theology span the 256 years of chattel slavery in the West and the survival and support commitments of Black women during this period including the new racism of the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s.”²² Alice Walker’s womanist roots come from the mother-child relationship and the characterization of nurturing physically and emotionally. Womanist Theology leans on how Black women empower and nurture each other through the lens of Christianity and other experiences. Stacy M. Floyd-Thomas, the first doctoral student of the late Dr. Katie Cannon, a pioneer of Womanist Theology, received a letter of congratulations and encouragement before her first meeting with Dr. Cannon. It was written at Cannon’s parent’s kitchen table in Kannapolis, North Carolina. It speaks of Cannon’s criteria and how the work before them is the work of their souls. More importantly, Cannon outlines the three points of reference on the usefulness of womanist ethics:

(1) to know and do justice to the moral resources and tradition of Black women’s lives; (2) to help Black women remember, redeem and reproduce the moral wisdom that they utilize; and (3) to engage Black women and other feminists of color who have given up on the community of faith so we might gain new insights concerning the reasonableness of theological ethics in deepening our character, consciousness, and capacity in our collective struggle for survival.²³

²¹ Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 92.

²² Emilie M. Townes, “Womanist Theologies,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 57, no. 3/4 (2003): 160.

²³ Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, “Katie’s Canon: Enfleshing Womanism, Mentoring, and the Soul of the Black Community,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 102.

The introduction of a grief support group to the African American women of County Line Baptist Church could model itself from how Cannon outlines the significance of Womanist Theology. Taking the same template from the above letter, the participants can expect that the grief support group will take into consideration: 1) Black woman's experience of living and experiencing loss; 2) naming the cause for their grief; 3) identifying how it looks in their lives; 4) begin utilizing tools to heal from this period of mourning; 5) see themselves through the lens of Christ; and 6) finally claim emotional health assistance (as provided by the church) as something they too are worthy of and have no shame in asking for counseling.

Support groups and therapy are not relegated to a particular race or the affluent of society even though there is the stigma "that mental health treatment was designed by White people for White people."²⁴ "Just one in three African Americans who struggle with mental health issues will ever receive appropriate treatment."²⁵ Canon's equally brilliant co-pioneer in Womanist Theology, Delores Williams, explored the structure of this theology in her book *Sisters in the Wilderness* by laying bare how:

Womanist Theology attempts to help Black women see, affirm and have confidence in the importance of their experience and faith for determining the character of the Christian religion in the African American community. Womanist Theology challenges all oppressive forces impeding Black women's struggle for survival and for the development of a positive, productive quality of life conducive to women's and the family's freedom and well-being.²⁶

²⁴ Monica T. Williams, "Why African Americans Avoid Psychotherapy," *Psychology Today*, November 2, 2011, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/culturally-speaking/201111/why-african-americans-avoid-psychotherapy>.

²⁵ Ruth White, "Why Mental Health Care is Stigmatized in Black Communities," USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work, February 12, 2019, <https://dworakpeck.usc.edu/news/why-mental-health-care-stigmatized-Black-communities>.

²⁶ Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 60.

Williams helped author Pierce understand that Black women are also pulling theological source material from their own lives to understand their importance and not just from the Christian scripture.²⁷ Life experience and biblical text are vital to successful results for this support group. One key source to this support group, *Using Groups to Help People*, is authored by a leading author in the field, Dorothy Stock Whitaker. The right format of joining this group of women together is vital and should match the women of County Line Baptist Church and be attentive, knowing when to intervene, and how to turn problematic situations into opportunities for victory.

Womanist Theology provides an outline for grief ministry to allow personal healing for mournful hearts. This nurturing spans generations of African American women who gather in the sacred spaces at kitchen tables, club meetings, front porches, gardens, and praying at the sick and death beds alike along with gathering for prayer, church school, and other woman-based ministries within the church. This diversity in age of those in the grief support group allows a rapport to be established between the women in the church, shows that grief supersedes age, and provides a safe space for experiences to be shared across the age spectrum in anticipation that their sharing will lead to long term empathy or sympathy for one another.

Words Do Matter

In contrast, the late Toni Morrison lost her forty-five-year-old son, Slade, in 2010 to pancreatic cancer. Morrison, appropriately revered in her *New York Times* obituary as a “towering novelist of the Black Experience,” shared in a 2012 interview for *The*

²⁷ Yolanda Pierce, *In My Grandmother's House: Black Women, Faith, and the Stories We Inherit* (Minneapolis, MN: Broadleaf Books, 2021), 23.

Guardian about the lack of adequate words (versus the comfort of the word) at a time of such loss.²⁸ Again, grief is a universe where words are not protocol, but feelings are very real. There is no word or greeting card that provides in-context what each individual griever needs as a comfort. Morrison questioned what sympathies people could offer the bereaved.

“What do you say? There are no words for that. There really aren’t. Somebody tries to say, ‘I’m sorry, I’m so sorry.’ People say that to me. There’s no language for it. Sorry doesn’t do it. I think you should just hug people and mop their floor or something.”²⁹ Morrison, the word-filled genius we knew, had no words to express how she felt. She could not write, barely spoke a word, and as a writer, she sought comfort from books written by writers who lost their children. Morrison wanted to hear from like-minded individuals, the community of writers for which she belonged, and be encouraged by their experiences.

Morrison did not get the comfort she expected from other writers. She explained that “Books ... written about the death of a child are all about the author. And people who were trying to soothe me, I never heard anything about him [her son Slade]. They say it’s about the living, it’s not, it’s about the dead.”³⁰ This is especially true while preaching a eulogy since having been taught in seminary to preach to the friends and loved ones left behind. As a minister, one can comfort those left behind sitting on the pews thinking

²⁸ Margarita Fox, “Toni Morrison, Towering Novelist of the Black Experience, Dies at 88,” *New York Times* (August 6, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/06/books/toni-morrison-dead.html>.

²⁹ Emma Brockes, “Toni Morrison: ‘I Want to Feel What I Feel: Even If It’s Not Happiness,’” *The Guardian* (December 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/apr/13/toni-morrison-home-son-love>.

³⁰ Brockes, “Toni Morrison,” <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/apr/13/toni-morrison-home-son-love>.

about their dead loved one in the casket in front of them. Therefore, sights cannot be diminished when creating the curriculum for a grief support group that leaves no room for the deceased name and memories to be voiced, cried out angrily, joyfully, proudly, and with laughter.

“Womanists bring forth the legacy of our grandmamas and great grandmamas and carry their notions in the embodiment of a life that we create daily. Black women understand this language of Black women; it accentuates intra-group talk. It is a language of compassion, and yet it is no-nonsense.”³¹ The conversations between African American women are an ever-ending story moving from life chapter to life chapter and sometimes one life experience to another. Sharing thoughts with individuals with similar attributes in common may be able to speak the language that is often recognized by others of like interest as an African American woman to another African American woman. Words do matter, and perhaps it matters who is speaking it in times of need.

What is Your Story?

Everybody has a story. In her research, Pierce started paying attention to the source material of African American women she encountered in life. The source material reflected the history of women that raised her at home and in the church and how that informed her story.³² Whether it is believed that we are skilled to tell it in black and white and it becomes a *New York Times* bestseller or an oral testimonial. The African American’s story about grief individually and collectively has significance and the power

³¹ Linda E. Thomas, “Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm,” *Cross Currents* 48, no. 4 (Winter 1998-1999): 488-499.

³² Pierce, *In My Grandmother’s House*, 23.

to heal the storyteller and the audience. “Storytelling can facilitate growth and empathy. It can enable the parishioner to be specific when describing events ... and it can help the counselor express his or her feelings about what is taking place in the parishioner’s life in ways that can lead to growth.”³³ Alongside storytelling is the method of story-listening, or the theology of story listening, or theosony. This is:

An important dimension of African American pastoral care, and the narrative approach... Story-listening involves empathetically hearing the story of the [deceased] person ... that we attend to the [bereaved] with our presence, body posture, and nonverbal responses. It also means using verbal responses to communicate that we have understood and are seeking to understand the person’s story as it is unfolding.³⁴

In order to successfully lead story-listening, so that the process stays on task the following tools are available: (1) “literature on storytelling within the context of counseling and psychotherapy; and (2) [as a result of growth in the support group leader’s personal life] life stories and [to] participate in the faith story (why we exist) will be a reservoir of conflict-free and anxiety-free stories” for the appropriate use in grief ministry.³⁵

When sharing one's loss story and incorporating faith, one should use the process that Anne Wimberly states in her book *Soul Stories*. Story-linking is a process whereby connection of parts of our everyday stories with the Christian faith story in the Bible stories by using them as mirrors through which we reflect critically on the liberation we

³³ Edward P. Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), 7.

³⁴ Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care*, 7.

³⁵ Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care*, 7.

have already found or are still seeking, as well as glean wisdom that guides our ongoing liberating efforts.³⁶

Methodology

Application 1: Theology of Grief and Death

The participants will learn the theology of grief and death. Significant scholars will demonstrate how the participants can process their grief and be reminded as Christians that earthly death is not the end. The hope is Jesus Christ, and his resurrection provides hope to mourners that go beyond the grave. The relationship of a loved one who has died has not ended. Death alters that relationship but does not allow the survivors to no longer talk, laugh, memorialize, in addition to crying for the beloveds who have passed on. Learning such scholarship gives hope to the participants who need tools on how to survive the death of a loved one versus mourning for the remainder of their lives.

Application 2: Sharing Your Story

Even before the first published works from African American poet Phillis Wheatley in 1773, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, or novelist Harriet Wilson in 1859, *Our Nig*, African American storytelling was creating a rich oral genre. Storytelling encompasses songs, and jokes “the dozens,” philosophical sayings, stories, rhymes that span generations and are very present today. Storytelling via story-linking in the grief support group curriculum allows participants to share anecdotes about their

³⁶ Anne Streaty Wimberly, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 26.

deceased loved ones, their lives with loved ones, and a Bible story that links their experiences together through faith. Within the context of the story-linking process, individuals will choose a biblical reference aligned with each participant to demonstrate how our modern lives share similar histories with the people and circumstances from biblical times.

The story-linking model takes a cross-generational look at how each deceased life story crosses paths with each session participant, either as a parent, sibling, friend, or mentor that grieves their loss. This age spread allows a rapport to be established between the ladies in the church, shows that grief supersedes age and provides a safe space for experiences to be shared across the age spectrum in anticipation that their sharing will lead to long-term empathy or sympathy for one another.

Application 3: Focused Journaling

Focused journaling allows the woman to put feelings on paper. It provides freedom for women to put “truth to power” but allows them to do so without fear or shame. Focused journaling also allows them to express, on paper, their response and thoughts to the questions being asked during the teaching session of the six weeks. This allows the participants to identify and address the grief they are experiencing. Thoughts that some women can only write but dare not publicly voice. Again, there may be a time when it becomes more liberating to publicly share such journal entries as a way to heal and provide testimony for others in similar positions mourning the loss of a loved one. As the women write, they will focus on a particular topic or question to allow them to process their grief. May God begin to reveal his plans for their lives as they walk out of a

season of sadness to hope. “For surely, I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope” (Jer. 29:11).

Conclusion

Establishing a grief support group will encourage the women at the rural County Line Baptist Church. Established during the Reconstruction Period in these United States in 1867, this church was erected after this country’s history saw the legal demarcation ending formal slavery. Yet the domino effect of racism and discrimination has continued since that era by way of Jim Crow laws, segregation, and economic inequalities. The compound addition of being female is the addendum in the life stories of Black women. It is a significant heaviness. The creation of a grief support group aims to heal a specialized group of women who have historically been the backbone of the Black church and family unit due to nurturing and caregiving roles. Yet, despite being the strong one, when in mourning she needs somebody’s help. Even Dr. Charles Hayes’ song “*Work it Out*” with the verse that says “*Jesus can work it out*” still needs us on earth to do the work on earth.³⁷ Therefore, a grief curriculum to work out the effects of loss will be created. To help the African American women at County Line Baptist Church, a church with a predominant number of congregants over the age of eighty who have buried and outlived a number of family members and friends. These generational connections are old, but the grief ranges from a fresh season of deaths due to the global pandemic and as old as years. The foundation is rooted in the Theology of Death, Christian Anthropology: Death and Mourning, Eschatology: Resurrection (The Hope of Resurrection), and Ecclesiology:

³⁷ Dianne Williams, Charles G. Hayes, and The Warriors, “Work It Out,” Track 3 on *The Remix*, (Icee Records, 2005), CD.

Rituals of Mourning. Womanist Theology is the module for the assembly and organization of the grief support group. Together these theologies will anchor the curriculum for small, intimate, and safe group sessions that allow the participants to have a form of their own women's club.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

For this chapter, the focus will be on the psychological discipline viewpoint of grief and how it provides a way of understanding what is going on inside the women at County Line Baptist Church. As a result, the therapeutic process introduced can be used as tools to assist in their healing process.

The theories explored in this research regarding grief, such as stages of grief, attachment theory, and tasks of mourning, specifically related to the women of County Line Baptist Church, will be discussed. Since the ministry context addressed in this research is a predominantly African American population, the African American culture will slightly be addressed to consider how such information may impact grief. This research hopes to clarify which discipline offers the most helpful information to understand grief.

It is believed that if the women of County Line Baptist Church are given the tools necessary to process grief, they will gain awareness of how to adapt to stages of loss and allow healing to begin. It is essential to mention here that, though grief can be connected to any loss, such as the loss of a job, ending of a relationship, or the loss of a life that once was, this chapter will focus on loss associated with the death of a loved one only. Further, by studying various approaches, the hope is to gain more insight not only to

continue healing but to assist the women in the ministry context to start the process if needed.

Death continues to ride the ashen-pale horse of ambivalence. For some, it is a welcomed visitor ready to transport one to a final place of dignity. For others, it is a relentless intruder into an otherwise meaningful pilgrimage of life. Regardless of how or when death arrives, its sting is real for those who remain—for those who must make sense of the void left by a now absent life.¹

History on Grief Study

Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* was published in 1651. As its title indicates, it was a treatise on the nature of melancholy, or depression as it is now called. In several places, Burton discussed bereavement and other forms of loss, illustrated by an extensive knowledge of history, literature, and the medicine of the time.² Grief has been understood by those who have studied it in the past as a natural human reaction, as a psychiatric disorder and as a disease process.³ Robert Burton's description reveals all three aspects: it is a natural reaction or 'passion,' yet it produces mental suffering and afflicts physical health. All three statements contain some element of truth, but the first one is perhaps the most useful for understanding the meaning and origins of grief.⁴

The American physician, Benjamin Rush (1812) included a short section on grief in his book on 'the diseases of the mind,' noting its immediate and long-term

¹ Hal Ritter, "Perspectives on Thanatology: Moving from Theory to Practice—Or, Is Death a Bad Idea?" *Journal of Pastoral Care* 47, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 428–31, <https://search-ebscohost-com.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA0000872209&site=ehost-live>.

² John Archer, *The Nature of Grief: The Evolution and Psychology of Reactions to Loss* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group, 1999), 11, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=180164>.

³ Archer, *The Nature of Grief*, 1.

⁴ Archer, *The Nature of Grief*, 1.

characteristics, and its increased risk of mortality. He also outlined a variety of remedies, both physical and ‘moral.’ These included administering opium, encouraging crying, and in cases of great emotion, bleeding, and purges, which were generally advocated for physical ailments at that time.⁵ In his book on emotional expressions, Charles Darwin carefully described the mechanics of weeping; and he followed this with an account of the expressions associated with grief and depression.⁶ Darwin goes on to describe the outward expression of grief in monkeys and apes. His descriptions caused interest in John Bowlby and James Averill, to the occurrence of grief in other animals, and this triggered grief biological origin and importance.

Despite such earlier contributions, the first extended discussion of the psychology of grief is found in a book on instincts and emotions written by the British psychologist (A. F. Shand).⁷ Shand referred to grief in terms of the laws of sorrow. In the absence of research, these ‘laws’ were illustrated by works of poetry and literature. Shand described many other aspects of grief, such as the importance of social support, the continued tie to the deceased, and the additional distress caused by sudden death. Shand’s writings on grief had little influence on the research. Bowlby’s book on loss acknowledges Shand’s contribution to the term grief. Shand’s work took a backseat to Freud, who had become the dominant influence on grief research and theory.

Freud’s theoretical analysis of grief influenced several further psychoanalytic descriptions, the first being that of Abraham (1924).⁸ In addition, there is reference to

⁵ Archer, *The Nature of Grief*, 12.

⁶ Archer, *The Nature of Grief*, 12.

⁷ Archer, *The Nature of Grief*, 13.

⁸ Archer, *The Nature of Grief*, 15.

grief in psychological and psychiatric writings. In 1930, the American sociologist Thomas D. Eliot wrote that widows and orphans research was centered around their economic adjustment, overlooking the psychological impact of bereavement. Eliot began to study the impact of grief on families. There have been further studies by other researchers as well on this topic. The study writing and research on grief has evolved over the centuries. The studied has expanded from not only widowed loss, but loss of child and or spouse.

As stated in the book, *The Nature of Grief*, Archer explains that grief involves a rich array of feelings and thoughts, which go beyond the separation reactions occurring in animals. There are higher-order mental processes, such as intrusive thoughts, hallucinations, feelings of a change in identity, and defenses against the distressing aspects of grief. For a full appreciation of human grief, we must turn to those branches of psychology that can inform us about mental processes.⁹ Several theorists have provided an overall conceptual framework for understanding the way the mental processes involved in grief are generated. These frameworks complement the accounts derived from attachment rather than replacing them.¹⁰

With life experiences, Archer states that we develop complex ideas about our identities. These ideas are intimately connected to other aspects of life that render important to individuals, such as close personal relationships, family, home, job, and cherished possessions and beliefs. Most of these aspects are central to who we are and build not only our identity but our self-esteem. These aspects not only govern the

⁹ Archer, *The Nature of Grief*, 7.

¹⁰ Archer, *The Nature of Grief*, 7.

assumptions we make about ourselves and our personal worlds, but also enable us to make plans, safe in the knowledge that our personal world is stable.¹¹ Archer says that if there is any change in these elements that challenge our stability or change, it will come with high emotion and pain and may take a long time to complete. It is this process that the essence of grief is formed. With the death of a loved one, brings a lot of change.

For the past fifty years—more for those in the field of medicine—most discussions and studies centering on death and grief have begun with the work of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. In the book, *On Death and Dying*, Kubler-Ross sets out the well-known five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Until this research, death, and dying appeared to be a topic not discussed and understood.

Popular as her work is, it is widely misunderstood in both intent and scope. Kubler-Ross, a psychiatrist by training, served as a resident at the Manhattan State Hospital early in her career. While working there, she came to see the unpleasant way in which terminally ill patients were treated and decided to focus her work on understanding and to improve the end-of-life process. Though mourning one's impending death and grieving the loss of a loved one have features in common, they are not wholly the same process. Further, Kubler-Ross did not set out to write a guidebook to the process of grieving a loss.¹² There is so much more to the process of grieving that has yet been researched. While it is possible to gain insights into the grief process through the reading of Kubler-Ross's early work, it does not present a comprehensive understanding, specifically for the survivors left behind.

¹¹ Archer, *The Nature of Grief*, 7.

¹² Alan Kellehear, "Introduction," in *On Death and Dying: 40th Anniversary Edition*, by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2009), viii.

Though Kubler-Ross brought the participant of death and dying into broad discussion among the American public, she was not the first to write on this topic. In recent years, many other professions have tackled the participant of death and dying, such as medical professionals, counseling practitioners, and clergy members they have all helped to widen the understanding of the grief process.

Grief as a Psychology Process

Psychology is a discipline that have, in some way, addressed the field of thanatology, death and dying. “Grief can be described as a natural human reaction, since it is a universal feature of human existence irrespective of culture, although the form and intensity its expression takes varies considerably.”¹³

Grief experienced under traumatic circumstances would be classified as a post-traumatic stress disorder; and intense and exaggerated forms of grief reactions, such as severe depression or pronounced panic or anxiety, can lead to a psychiatric diagnosis.¹⁴ There are higher-order mental processes, such as intrusive thoughts, hallucinations, feelings of a change in identity, defenses against the distressing aspects of grief.

Defining Grief

Before delving more deeply into the theories of grief, it is necessary to define terms. Vocabulary surrounding death, such as words like grief, mourning, and bereavement, has been introduced in previous chapters. However, here is where the

¹³ Archer, *The Nature of Grief*, 2.

¹⁴ Archer, *The Nature of Grief*, 2.

definition will provide a greater benefit to the reader. These terms are often used interchangeably when, in truth, they have different meanings. The National Center for Biotechnology Information, as part of their PDQ Cancer Information Series, offers the following definitions:

Grief is defined as the primarily emotional/affective process of reacting to the loss of a loved one through death. The focus is on the internal, intrapsychic process of the individual. *Mourning* is defined as the public display of grief. While grief focuses more on the internal or intrapsychic experience of loss, mourning emphasizes the external or public expressions of grief. Consequently, mourning is influenced by one's beliefs, religious practices, and cultural context. *Bereavement* is defined as the objective situation one faces after having lost an important person via death. Bereavement is conceptualized as the broadest of the three terms defined in this section and as a statement of the objective reality of a situation of loss via death.¹⁵

Types of Grief

Several other types of grief should be defined in this space, as they may have affected the lives of the women at County Line Baptist Church: anticipatory grief, secondary grief or secondary loss, complicated grief, and disenfranchised grief. Anticipatory grief is felt when someone that is loved is expected to die soon. That anticipation is the beginning of the end in one's mind.¹⁶ Often this is seen by family members who have a loved one with a terminal illness. One usually knows that the time is coming near to say goodbye to their loved one; therefore, mental preparation begins. At the same time, the individual is still living, so one cannot allow oneself to let go of the present just yet.

¹⁵ S. Mughal, Y. Azhar, and W. J. Siddiqui, *Grief Reaction* (Treasure Island, FL: StatPearls Publishing, 2020), 1, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK507832/>.

¹⁶ Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss* (London, UK: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 2014), 1.

A moment is recalled with a family member who was diagnosed with a terminal illness. When it was clear that the eldest sister would die, as the youngest sibling did what was necessary to prepare her mind for the death. As she would render care to her eldest sister on weekends and days off from work, she slowly saw her sister's physical health weaken. Her sister had already accepted the doctor's report, but more importantly, God's will. So, because of that, her sister prepared herself and others around for her "homegoing." She prepared her most precious items to be given away. With her family's assistance, she prepared her memorial service and the release of her ashes. There was time to anticipate what was soon to come; it was also a comforting presence because that sister had expected the outcome for her own life. Just because one anticipates the death of a loved one, does not make grief easier when the death occurs.

Secondary grief or loss is the psychological and physical reactions of the bereaved person experienced due to loss of a loved one. It is remembered sharing a moment with a church mother. The mother who was experiencing secondary grief as a result of losing her son to cancer. After the death of her son, she experienced other losses. Her son died in his early twenties; she cried as she shared that she would never see her son walk down the aisle or him have children. The mother regretted that she would not be a mother-in-law or grandmother to her son's children. The roles and responsibilities that this mother would not experience caused this mother to experience secondary grief. Other secondary losses were explained previously in this document.

Complicated grief is grief that may not diminish or resolve naturally given time and space to live the experience. Among the situations that might lead to complicated

grief, Parkes includes the following determinants of bereavement that affect the outcome of how one deals with grief:

Antecedent

- Relationship with the deceased
 - Kinship (spouse, child, parent, etc.)
 - Strength of attachment
 - Security of attachment
 - Degree of reliance
 - Involvement
 - The intensity of ambivalence (love/hate)
- Childhood experiences (especially insecure parenting and losses of significant persons)
- Later experiences (especially losses of significant persons)
- Previous mental illness (especially depressive illness)
- Life crises prior to the bereavement
- Mode of death
 - Timelessness
 - Multiple deaths
 - Previous warnings
 - Preparation for bereavement
 - Violent or horrific deaths
 - Disenfranchised deaths
 - Culpable deaths

Concurrent

- Gender
- Age
- Personality
 - Grief proneness
 - Inhibition of feelings
- Socioeconomic status (social class)
- Nationality
- Religion (faith and rituals)
- Cultural and familial factors expression of grief influencing

Subsequent

- Social support or isolation
- Secondary stresses
- Emergent life opportunities (options open)

Parkes uses this Risk Assessment Knowledge of the determinants of grief to enables practitioners in his study to identify widows and other bereaved people who are at high risk of getting into difficulties; that is to say, people to whom it may be appropriate to offer counseling or other forms of help after bereavement.¹⁷ These determinants may be useful to identify the women in the ministry context that may identify needing more professional assistance to process their grief to get pass complicated grief. Parkes mentions that with complicated grief very few individuals seek psychiatric help. He also states those individuals that do seek psychiatric help does not necessarily mean that they met the criteria for psychiatric disorders.¹⁸

The last type of grief that will be discussed in this space is disenfranchised grief. Kenneth Doka, who coined the term, describes disenfranchised grief as follows “Grief that persons’ experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, socially sanctioned or publicly mourned.”¹⁹ There are many examples of this, including an estranged family member, a former romantic partner, or a same-sex romantic partner. Other feelings of disenfranchised grief can include a woman grieving

¹⁷ Parkes and Prigerson, *Bereavement*, 248-249.

¹⁸ Colin Murray Parkes and Holly G. Prigerson, *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life*, 4th ed. (New York, NY: Taylor and Francis Group, 2009), 221, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/reader.action?docID=1582028&ppg=1>.

¹⁹ Kenneth Doka, *Disenfranchised Grief: Recognizing Hidden Sorrow* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1989), 3–11.

an abortion or a miscarriage, a mother whose child dies because he or she committed a crime, or a child who dies due to an overdose.

A young lady experienced this disenfranchised grief when her son was shot and killed during a gang-related incident. Many would ask this mother, “why was your son a part of a gang.” The reality to this mother, that question was not on her radar. She grieved her son as any mother would grieve a child regardless of what a child may have done to get in that predicament. Some members of society would question her son’s character as if he was not loved and those affected by his grief are not supposed to mourn. This is not uncommon in many communities, where violence takes many young lives too soon. This is sad to say that one of the communities affected is the African American Community. In Virginia, from 2007-2018, over seventy-two percent of homicides involved a gun.²⁰ For years 2013-2017, Black men have been victims to gun-related homicide rate 8.1 to Black females and 11.3 times to White males.²¹ The reality is these communities are affected often. These victims’ family members are left to deal with the violent loss of their loved one.

Grief in African American Culture

In the introduction to their book, *African American Grief*, Paul Rosenblatt and Beverly Wallace, advise readers that there is not much scholarship on African American

²⁰ Rose Hobron, “Gun Violence in Virginia,” Virginia Department of Health, [http://vscc.virginia.gov/OCME%20VDH%20Gun%20Violence%20in%20Virginia%20\(Non-Fatal%20and%20Fatal\).pdf](http://vscc.virginia.gov/OCME%20VDH%20Gun%20Violence%20in%20Virginia%20(Non-Fatal%20and%20Fatal).pdf).

²¹ Hobron, “Gun Violence in Virginia,” [http://vscc.virginia.gov/OCME%20VDH%20Gun%20Violence%20in%20Virginia%20\(Non-Fatal%20and%20Fatal\).pdf](http://vscc.virginia.gov/OCME%20VDH%20Gun%20Violence%20in%20Virginia%20(Non-Fatal%20and%20Fatal).pdf).

grief.²² They suggest that this is the case because researchers assume that African American grief is similar to Euro-American grief; or more broadly, that grief is a fundamentally human experience. As such, everyone similarly experiences grief. They suggest that up to and throughout the twentieth century, research about African American grief was not in the forefront of research as posted above. “If someone understood one person’s grief journey, they could understand everyone’s grief journey.”²³ Navigating through grief, one became acquainted with how others in the African American community grieves. Is it possible that there is/was a difference in the way cultures grieve? Rosenblatt and Wallace states that African American grief differs from Euro-American because it is linked to past and present racism, discrimination, economic, familial, community, psychological, and spirituality entangled in grief.²⁴

While studying for a Bereavement and Grief Counseling Certificate, it is discussed how different cultures viewed grief and went about end-of-life practices. Though many people experience similar aspects of the grief journey. It is not hard to believe that there may be differences in culture and religious beliefs. It is possible to imagine that there is not one human grief experience that exists for everyone. In the African American experience, specifically, intergenerational trauma, cultural trauma, and violence in communities have made some numb to recurring pain as a survival strategy. These factors may contribute to the way that some African Americans experience grief.

²² Paul C. Rosenblatt and Beverly R. Wallace, *African American Grief* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2005), xi.

²³ Rosenblatt and Wallace, *African American Grief*, xi.

²⁴ Rosenblatt and Wallace, *African American Grief*, 171.

These are noteworthy perspectives to consider when designing a grief support curriculum for African American individuals.

Joy James, a professor of humanities at Williams College, writes about individual and collective grief in the African American community. He states that, "...Black suffering and death have become familiar, forming a backdrop to everyday reality. Premature, violent death, and captivity cease to astonish or seem unusual in this landscape. They no longer register as political phenomena."²⁵

This is of great consequence to how the African American community processes these events, leading to complicated grief. Either they doubt the validity of their grief in a society that fails to recognize the weight of the trauma, or their grief is heightened in reaction to a society that seems not to care about their physical and emotional well-being. James states those individuals in the African American community are "more likely to personalize and internalize violence rather than move against. So, the beloved community seems to be immobilized... avoiding a conversation about and with the dead."²⁶

Although Black males have experienced mental health challenges analogous to other marginalized populations, Black men dealing with loss and trauma have a greater risk of experiencing severe mental health challenges than their White counterparts due to racism, classism, economic inequalities, and socio-political injustices in existence since slavery. Although slavery was legally abolished in the United States in 1865, the legacy of slavery continues via systemic oppression, historical trauma, and race-based economic inequality. Thus, Black males lived experience is entrenched with elements of psychological, historical, interpersonal, and intrapsychic anguish.²⁷

²⁵ Joy James, "Black Suffering in Search of the 'Beloved Community': Political Imprisonment and Self-Defense," *Trans-Scripts: An Interdisciplinary Journal in the Humanities and Social Sciences* 1 (2011): 212-220.

²⁶ James, "Black Suffering," 212-220.

²⁷ Allen E. Lipscomb and Wendy Ashley, "Black Male Grief through the Lens of Racialization and Oppression: Effective Instruction for Graduate Clinical Programs," *International Research in Higher Education* 3, no. 2 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.5430/irhe.v3n2p51>.

It is agreed that Black men and women may feel that they cannot reach out due to mistrust of authority due to years of medical mistreatment. They may also think that they must fulfill an ideal of strength. Whatever the cause, it is important to think about ways to involve men in the future discussion and helping them navigate grief as well. Prior experience has taught one that the grief support group model, predominantly if populated mostly by woman, may not be the answer for the entire population of African Americans.

In specifically serving women, it is important to keep the various forces that may impact their grief in mind. These include the heightened sense of grief and disenfranchisement felt by African Americans daily in the United States, the idea of the “strong Black woman” who cannot show any frailty, and their connection as African American women to ideas of Christian theology. These forces are above and beyond other influences on grief felt by the individual.

Stages, Phases versus Tasks

Kubler-Ross stages have always been identified as the stages as one progresses through to process grief. Still, other theorists in thanatology have developed different stages, phases, and tasks to identify as an alternative to process grief. As Worden states in his book *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, that since mourning is a process, it has been reviewed in various ways in addition to the stages pinned by Kubler-Ross.

There can be a long debate about which approach is correctly related to how one processes the death of a loved one. I agree with Worden that there is some validity to both approaches. Grieving takes time, and there is no time limit on how long it will take an individual to progress to any stage, phase, or task. Healing is possible if the work is

put in. Often it is difficult, depending on the loss and type of loss to put in the “grief work” to process the loss. So, when the individual deals with their loss, they will ultimately, at some point, go through a process. For many who have experienced loss, having to process a loss can be daunting. As Worden says, the process itself can be overwhelming, but with support, and professional assistance, there is hope that it can be done. This can be a powerful antidote to the feelings of helplessness that many mourners experience.²⁸

As Worden borrowed from developmental psychology, he saw mourning—the adaptation to loss—as involving the four basic tasks outlined in the text that follows. He believes that is essential that the grieving person address the issue of these tasks in order to adapt to the loss. The tasks as with the grief stages, defined by Kubler-Ross, the tasks of mourning do not need to be completed in a specific order. Considering that the survivor may be at different levels, some may handle certain tasks more than another. For example, you cannot handle the emotional impact of a loss until you first come to terms with the fact that the loss has happened and is irreversible at least in this lifetime. Since mourning is a process and not a state, the following tasks require some effort—however, not every death loss we experience challenges these tasks in the same way. Grief is a cognitive process involving a confrontation with and restructuring thoughts about the deceased, the loss experience, and the changing world within which the bereaved must now live. Some would call this grief work.²⁹

Stages of Grief

Having differentiated between grief, bereavement, and mourning, let us now take a more in-depth look into stages of grief as defined by Kubler-Ross and Kessler. The six stages, again, are not intended to be part of a cycle that everyone will progress through during their grieving. It is instead a list of stages identified to be shared by those who

²⁸ J. William Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*, 5th ed. (New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, 2018), 39-40, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=5355008>.

²⁹ Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 41.

have experienced a loss. There is no specific timeframe attached to any one stage of grief. Kubler-Ross and co-writer David Kessler after research defined the following stages of grief denial, often paired with shock, is the first of the six stages.

Kubler-Ross and Kessler say that denial is more symbolic than literal. In many ways, it protects the mourner from the full power of grief.³⁰ For example, the survivor comes home and cannot believe that their family member will not greet them. This stage is characterized by imbalance and numbness; it is a time when the world seems to make little sense, and the tasks of daily life can seem overwhelming, if not impossible.

Anger often brings people back into their emotional life after denial. As anger is an emotion that most people have experienced, it is easily accessible and somewhat more manageable than some of the other feelings confronted by a mourner. The survivor can be angry for various reasons, such as why is my loved one gone; he or she was a good person; why did I survive; and survivors even become angry with the physicians.

Additionally, after a period of feeling adrift, anger can serve to give grief structure.³¹ Authors note that this emotion surface once the mourner feels safe enough to know they will probably survive what is to come.³² Anger can be seen as a gateway emotion, as it is experienced intensely, it dissipates, leaving room for more uncomfortable emotions such as despair and sadness.

Let us pause here to acknowledge that people of faith can find themselves angry at God during this stage. They may question God, asking, “Why? Why my son?” or “Why

³⁰ Kubler-Ross and Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving*, 8.

³¹ David Kessler, “The Five Stages of Grief: Because Love Never Dies,” Grief.com, <https://grief.com/the-five-stages-of-grief/>.

³² Kubler-Ross and Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving*, 11.

my sister?” They may feel as though God did not pay heed to their prayers or has abandoned them. There is much information in Christian scripture on grief that speaks of both comfort and God’s presence (for example, Ps. 23:4, Matt. 5:4, Jn. 16:22). For true healing, it is essential to bridge this rift and repair the relationship with the Divine to process grief.

Bargaining is the third of the stages, and it may occur before or after the death of a loved one. After a death, someone may “become lost in a maze of “If only...” or “What if...” statements. We want life returned to what it was; we want our loved one restored. We want to go back in time: find the tumor sooner, recognize the illness more quickly, stop the accident from happening.”³³ It can be challenging to envision a path toward healing in the bargaining stage as it places the mourner in a living space that will never exist again.

Guilt is integrally connected to bargaining. People often doubt their judgment after an accident or throughout an illness, perhaps reliving every tiny decision and chastising themselves for not choosing differently (whether or not a different decision would have changed the eventual outcome). This has been witnessed personally in the ministry context when an elderly member who experienced grief after losing a spouse. Her guilt prevented her from moving on to another stage. Her spouse fell one late evening, and she did not hear his cry for help. He later went to the hospital and died within two days. Although there were other reasons for his death, she held onto the idea that if she had been there to help him up off the floor, she would have been able to prevent his death.

³³ Kubler-Ross and Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving*, 17.

As a mourner begins to realize that they cannot negotiate themselves out of loss, depression often sets in. The level of depressive state can make one feel as though it will last forever. Kubler-Ross, and Kessler note that this type of depression is usually not a sign of mental illness. This type of feeling is normal to experience after a loss.³⁴ Depression, as it relates to grief, can be understood as deep sadness. Of course, there are more facets to depression, including lack of motivation, self-isolation, and in extreme cases, a desire to end one's life. Compounding these feelings of emptiness is the expectation from others that one be able to "get on with it" or "snap out of it" and return to elements of their life, such as work and social engagements, as they were before the death.

For women, as will be discussed in depth later, there can be an even greater expectation that they are strong and, ignoring or pushing away their grief, and return to caring for others. A person would have these feelings after a loved one dies, but what about a year or so later. What is one to do with those feelings of grief? Through experience, it is evident that grief has no timeline or time limit. No one is exempt from loss. Expression from loss can be different, but all will experience it.

Unlike Kubler-Ross and Kessler, Freud alludes to the all-encompassing nature of grief comparable to that of depression. He believes that the pain and suffering associated with both of these conditions arise from "the fixation of libidinal cathexis on the love-object, which is no longer available."³⁵ Freud believes that the inward and outward

³⁴ Kubler-Ross and Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving*, 20.

³⁵ Kubler-Ross and Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving*, 20.

manifestations of “melancholia” associated with mourning are healthy expressions of loss. He feels that these expressions manifest in depression.

Further, he believes that to heal from mourning, one needs to detach from the object (or subject) of their loss, an idea which is not present in the five stages of grief, as noted by Kubler-Ross.³⁶ This last point is not agreed upon because one can always have an attachment with the deceased loved one (attachment theory will be discussed later). Although the effect of the loss may not stay stagnant, and often lessens with time, one will never forget what they lost. A mother cannot replace a child, and though a widow may find love again, her feelings for her deceased spouse do not automatically diminish or disappear.

Acceptance is the fifth stage of grief Kubler-Ross addresses. Acceptance is often mistakenly understood to mean that the person who has suffered a loss is finished with their grief process and has “closed the book” on this chapter of their life. This stage is about accepting the reality that our loved ones are physically gone and recognizing that this new reality is the permanent reality. Kubler-Ross and Kessler say that “we will never like this reality or make it okay, but eventually, we accept it. We learn to live with it. It is the new norm with which we must learn to live.”³⁷ Acceptance marks that a person has acknowledged the loss on a deep, personal level, but it does not mark that the work of grief is done or that the person is “OK.”

Adjustment is one of the significant tasks of acceptance. The loss of a loved one often comes with a change of responsibilities, routines, roles, and habits. A church

³⁶ John E. Baker, “Mourning and the Transformation of Object Relationships: Evidence for the Persistence of Internal Attachments,” *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 18, no. 1 (2001).

³⁷ Kubler-Ross and Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving*, 25.

member experienced two devastating losses within months of each other, that of a daughter than that of a spouse. As it was not enough to lose a child, the member was devastated by the news that cancer had returned in her spouses' body. The back-to-back losses threw the church member into a whirlwind that she thought, and some of the church family thought she was losing her mind. The member did not get an opportunity to process the grief of losing a child before experiencing the anticipatory grief of her husband's death. The member had become so dependent on her spouse when he was living, that when he died suddenly, she did not know how to take care of the responsibilities of the home, which caused more grief. Multiple losses, compounded by her inability to manage the household, adversely affected her mental state, until everything seemed as though it was too much to handle. Her journey also became stagnant, and she was unable to move forward. Mourners need the time to make the necessary adjustments to a loss.

Finally, finding meaning is the sixth stage of grief pinned by David Kessler. Viktor Frankl's cornerstone work, *Man's Search for Meaning*, is a beacon for those who wonder how meaning can emerge from tragedy. Frankl's work shed light on how life's most challenging moments can produce amazing resilience, courage, and creativity.³⁸

A decade after Kubler-Ross's assertion that positives could be found in loss and death, psychologist Christopher Davis and his colleagues wrote an article in the *American Psychological Association's Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* in which they asserted that having any understanding of meaning was preferable to having none, and

³⁸ David Kessler, *Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2019), 14.

that the content of that understanding did not seem to matter.³⁹ This study aligned with Kessler's experience. He stated that seven elements are necessary to process the sixth stage of grief. 1. Meaning is relative and personal. 2. Meaning takes time. 3. Meaning does not require understanding. 4. Even when one defines meaning, it will not feel it was worth the cost. 5. Your loss is not a test, a lesson, something to hand, a gift, or a blessing. 6. Only you can find your meaning. 7. Meaningful connections can replace those painful memories in time.⁴⁰

Grief and Gender

Although this study is not necessarily based on males, many women can relate to, showing strength is a way to get through the grieving process or not. In research, it found that many men are often taught to be strong; and, therefore, do not openly express their loss. Instead, a sign of strength may be shown to suppress their feelings.

Contemporary literature has indicated that African Americans and most Caucasian males suppress grief when bereaved. This is because males are raised (and expected) to be strong and in control of situations, confident about their world, courageous even in times of adversity, able to accomplish tasks, endure stress and pain, and serve as the providers. They are not permitted to cry openly, express fear, feel insecure or express loneliness, sadness, or depression.⁴¹

³⁹ Kessler, *Finding Meaning*, 15.

⁴⁰ David Kessler, "How to Deal with Difficult Feelings, How to Find Meaning After Loss," TED Talk (video).

⁴¹ Ananias Kumbuyo Nyanjaya, "A Pastoral Approach to Suppression of the Grief Process Among Males Leading to Death: A Reflection on an African Perspective in Zimbabwe," December 19, 2007, HDL Handle, <http://hdl.handle.net/2263/29137>.

Men and women, because of their socialization into sex roles, are likely to exhibit different grieving patterns. Men are more likely to be found on the instrumental end of the continuum; whereas women are more likely to exhibit an intuitive style. Yet, gender role socialization is but one factor that influences a pattern of grief. This leads to a critical affirmation that although patterns of grieving are certainly influenced by gender, they are not determined by gender.⁴²

Tasks of Mourning

Psychologist William Worden proposes four tasks of mourning to process grief. To process loss, it will take work to get through it. Task one is to accept the reality of the loss. Although death may be expected, the psyche may manage to protect the survivor as a defense mechanism. For the bereaved, when a death happens to an unexpected individual and trauma may have been involved, it may be difficult for an individual to face the reality of the loss. Worden says the first task is for the individual to accept that it is before them. This is not just a physical reality, but it must be accomplished by emotion as well.

The behavior, of which Bowlby and Parkes have written extensively, relates to the accomplishment of this task. Many people who have sustained a loss find themselves calling out for the lost person, and they sometimes tend to misidentify others in their environment.⁴³

⁴² Kenneth J. Doka and Terry L. Martin, *Grieving Beyond Gender: Understanding the Ways Men and Women Mourn*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Taylor and Francis Group, 2010), 126, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=646557>.

⁴³ Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 41.

The opposite of accepting the loss denies that their loved one has died, and there is no future relationship with that individual, at least here on earth. Some people refuse to believe that death is real and get stuck in the mourning process at this first task. Denial can be practiced on several levels and can take various forms, but it most often involves either the facts of the loss, the meaning of the loss, or the irreversibility of the loss.⁴⁴

The progression through this task can be accomplished by participating in rituals related to ideas that can confirm the reality at hand. For example, attending a funeral and burial such as meeting with clergy, choosing music, writing a eulogy, or viewing the body. Rituals will further be discussed in this chapter.

Task two is processing your grief and pain. “The German word “schmerz” is appropriate for speaking of pain because its broad definition includes the literal physical pain that many people experience, and the emotional and behavioral pain associated with loss. It is necessary to acknowledge and work through this pain, or it can manifest itself through physical symptoms or some form of aberrant behavior.”⁴⁵

Parkes affirms this when he says, “If the bereaved person must go through the pain of grief to get the grief work done.”⁴⁶ Not everyone's pain will be experienced or expressed the same. Some determinants will affect how one deals with their loss. There is research to show depending on the attachment style of the individual, the survivor may not feel any pain at all or cut their feelings short. Society may play a role in these tasks and restrict or limit one's ability to feel whatever pain is needed to feel to get through the

⁴⁴ Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 41.

⁴⁵ Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 45.

⁴⁶ Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 45.

process. Bowlby said, “Sooner or later, some of those who avoid all conscious grieving, break down— usually with some form of depression.”⁴⁷ Feeling is important.

The object of this task is to navigate through what may seem to be insurmountable, difficult, or negative emotions. This can be accomplished by talking with a friend or only allowing them to hold a hand as the mourner cries, by sifting through pictures or journals containing references to the deceased or planning something in their memory such as planting a tree or setting up a scholarship fund. The bottom-line for the mourner is to feel the pain and hurt.

Task three is to adjust to the world without the deceased. There are three areas of adjustment that need to be addressed after losing a loved one to death. “There are the external adjustments, or how the death affects one’s everyday functioning in the world; internal adjustments, or how the death affects one’s sense of self; and spiritual adjustments, or how the death affects one’s beliefs, values, and assumptions about the world.”⁴⁸

Not only do the bereaved have to adjust to the loss of roles previously played by the deceased, but death also presents them with the challenge of adjusting to their sense of internal self. The survivor looks at themselves and how death affects self-definition, self-esteem, and a sense of self-efficacy. Some studies posit that for women who define their identity through relationships and caring for others, bereavement means not only the loss of a significant other but also the sense of a loss of self.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ John Bowlby, "Attachment and Loss: Retrospect and Prospect," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 52, no. 4 (10): 1982, 664-678, doi:<http://dx.doi.org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.1982.tb01456.x>.

⁴⁸ Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 47.

⁴⁹ Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 48.

There are many ways to complete this task. For instance, someone might take off a wedding ring, go solo on a vacation that had been planned as a couple, or being free to listen to music that their loved one did not like. Sometimes, tasks are not chosen, but thrust upon the grieving party; this includes things like having to load the dishwasher or grocery shopping.

Task four is to find a way to remember the deceased while embarking on the rest of one's journey through life. Worden defined the fourth task of mourning as withdrawing emotional energy from the deceased and reinvesting it in another relationship. This concept was posited by Freud when he said, "Mourning has quite a precise psychical task to perform: its function is to detach the survivor's hopes, and memories from the dead."⁵⁰

After research, theorists now understand that people do not detach themselves from their deceased loved one but find ways to remember them. Sometimes these remembrances and connections are called continuing bonds.⁵¹ Many people find this task extremely difficult; it may take months or years to complete. This requires that the person who suffered the loss find a way to remain attached or emotionally connected to their loved one while not allowing this connection to hold them back from moving back into active, productive life.⁵² This process can come to an end. Volkan says that mourning ends when the mourner no longer needs to reactivate the representation of the dead with exaggerated intensity during daily living. Shuchter and Zisook wrote, "A survivor's

⁵⁰ Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 50.

⁵¹ Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 50.

⁵² Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 50.

readiness to enter new relationships depends not on “giving up” the dead spouse but on finding a suitable place for the spouse in the psychological life of the bereaved— an important place, but that leaves room for others.”⁵³

One advantage of these tasks is that they are concrete actions, which can help move someone in the choppy sea of grief. While in a state of active grief, it may be difficult for someone to understand how they might ever process their pain; but having a conversation about their loss with a friend allows someone to do the work of this task in a familiar, comfortable setting. As the church is both comfortable and familiar for many of the women who might attend a church-sponsored grief group, they might engage in the tasks outlined above through different church activities.

Grief Experience Inventory

Parkes’ research had its roots in a clinical tradition which emphasized case studies and in-depth interviews (although he also used rating scales). Modern North American researchers of grief developed a preference for standardized questionnaires rather than detailed interviews, The Revised Grief Experience Inventory, or RGEI. This inventory is a list of twenty-two items investigating four domains: existential tension, depression, tension and guilt, and physical distress. To help the women of the context process their grief and not only to find out where they are mentally, the RGEI will be provided and followed up with activities that will help the women process their positive and negative feelings concerning the loss of their deceased loved one.

⁵³ Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 51.

Attachment Theory

Dr. John Bowlby's psychoanalyst pinned the concept of attachment theory. This psychiatrist further researched, where Konrad Lorenz studied stopped concerning maternal care. Attachment theory is a deeper dive into understanding the relationship that a six month to two-years-of-age infant experiences with his or her caregiver. These two critical components of one of the primary relationships that an individual has in the early stages of one's life have a significant impact on other future relationships even after death.⁵⁴

Close relationships among family members often result in attachment, when that relationship is altered through events such as marriage, estrangement, and death, grief can occur. Although it can be normal to attach oneself to a loved one during a relationship, that depth or lack thereof can affect one's grieving process and cause a hindrance in their grieving process, even to complicate the process which is later discussed in this chapter.

This feeling has been experienced first-hand as after suffering the loss of mother at a young age. The relationship between a mother and daughter was the epitome of a great mother and daughter relationship. Quality time spent, not just in younger years, but adult years as well. It is remembered when the phone rang in the month of May. The call was from the local hospital at 11:48 p.m., and hearing the doctor say that "they" did all they could do but the mother went into cardiac arrest. There was silence waiting for the doctor to carry on the conversation, but he did not. He only said that mother was gone. The pain felt to lose the only remaining parent was unbearable and remained unbearable.

⁵⁴ John Bowlby, "Attachment and Loss: Retrospect and Prospect," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 52, no. 4 (10): 1982, 664-678, doi:<http://dx.doi.org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.1982.tb01456.x>.

Everything was done not to feel the pain necessary to go through the grieving process. However, later, it was realized that if the loved that was shared with mother was not so strong, the grief may not be so painful. The grief process would be altered altogether.

In the ministry, context members have buried their mother and look stoic as the morticians lower the casket into the ground. Church members have cried out for their mother as she was the one that represented the glue to the family. As experienced and explained in Bowlby's Attachment Theory, attachment is necessary in the beginning of relationships. Still, once those strong relationships are altered, it may cause complications for experiencing the loss of a special relationship.

The Place of Ritual

Rituals such as funerals and memorials services hold an essential place in processing grief to deter it from becoming complicated grief. Alice Zulli states that rituals can help to restore a sense of balance to life. Although many ceremonies or rituals for one occasion or another, few understand why rituals help to adjust to change. Even fewer understand the power of rituals to strengthen the bonds that connect us. Zulli states that rituals empower people emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.⁵⁵ Historically and culturally end of life rituals is performed as a rite of passage. Zulli suggests that if "the funeral service if it is done well, can be an important adjunct to aiding and abetting the healthy resolution of grief. Seeing the body of the deceased person helps to bring home the reality and finality of death."⁵⁶ This process can begin the grieving process for

⁵⁵ Alice Parson Zulli, *Living with Grief: Who We Are How We Grieve* (Philadelphia, PA: Brunner/Mazel, 1998), 261.

⁵⁶ Zulli, *Living with Grief*, 261.

individuals, especially for those who may have not accepted the reality of their loss.

Rituals are cultural devices that facilitate the preservation of social order and provide ways to comprehend the complex and contradictory aspects of human existence within a given societal context.⁵⁷ End of Life rituals have been around, but Kenneth Doka expound on the idea of establishing rituals as a therapeutic device to help one process grief. He states these rituals can connect the spiritual/humanistic side with an individual culture.⁵⁸

An individual can establish any ritual that will help them progress through grief. There is no right or wrong. Doka offers four types of rituals that he has witness in his previous studies that may be helpful for a griever to participant in.

Rituals of Continuity- emphasis the continuity bond with the deceased. Ex. Lighting a candle on the anniversary of the death of the deceased loved one as a way to remember them.
 Rituals of transitions- Marks the movement or change in the grieving process. Ex. Cleaning the deceased loved one closet.
 Rituals of reconciliation- Allows the individual to express or receive forgiveness or to offer a last message or simply farewell. Ex. Writing a letter to deceased loved one expressing emotions.
 Rituals of affirmation- Allows the bereaved person to thank the deceased for his or her presence and legacies. Ex. Finding a way to thank the deceased for the impact they made on one's life.⁵⁹

In Suzanne Smith's understanding, African Americans participate in end-of-life rituals that may be culturally based to assist in the grieving process. Many of these rituals are

⁵⁷ Bronna D. Romanoff and Marion Terenzio, "Rituals and the Grieving Process," *Death Studies* 22, no. 8 (December 1998): 697-711, <http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/scholarly-journals/rituals-grieving-process/docview/231346056/se-2?accountid=202487>.

⁵⁸ Kenneth. J. Doka, *Grief is a Journey: Finding Your Path Through Loss* (New York, NY: Atria, 2016), 226-227.

⁵⁹ Doka, *Grief is a Journey*, 226-227.

passed on through generations. Deaths were not only mourned but celebrated. She suggests that death and the rituals surrounding it were:

Not feared but rather embraced as the ultimate “homegoing,” a welcome journey to a spiritual existence that would transcend the suffering and injustices of the mortal world. As W. E. B. Du Bois wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk*, “Of death the Negro showed little fear, but talked of it familiarly and even fondly as simply crossing the waters, perhaps— who knows?—back to his ancient forests again.” The vision of death as a homegoing was most powerfully captured in the lyrics of the famous slave spiritual “Oh, Freedom”: Oh Freedom, Oh Freedom, Oh Freedom over me! And before I am a slave, I’ll be buried in my grave And go home to my Lord And be free.⁶⁰

It is clear that in many African American cultures, view of death stems from enslavement. In truth, the customs surrounding a death can have their roots in West and Central Africa. According to Smith, “These rituals traveled to the New World via the transatlantic slave trade and ultimately influenced the traditions of African American slave funerals from the early colonial period through the antebellum period.”⁶¹ Regardless of which rituals are experienced or not, rituals can begin the process of healing, and in some circumstances, to continue healing, some new rituals may be necessary to establish to process grief.

Methodology

There are many ways to address grief in women. As suggested, simply arming them with some of the information laid out above may help them understand their grief journey. With knowledge of the above theories, they might realize that though grief after

⁶⁰ Suzanne E. Smith, *To Serve the Living: Funeral Directors and the African American Way of Death* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 18, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=3300886>.

⁶¹ Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 18.

the loss of a loved one is painful or difficult, it is normal. Further, given certain insights, those who are grieving and members of their extended family and community can watch for signs of physical and psychological challenges that often arise with complicated grief. Though support groups and grief ministries are beneficial, sometimes, it is important to refer a person to a different type of support, such as professional counseling.

As the church is both comfortable and familiar for many of the women who might attend a church-sponsored grief group, they might engage in the grief stages and tasks outlined by Kubler-Ross, Kessler and Worden through different curriculum activities. Clergy and church family can encourage this behavior and offer recognition and encouragement when they see a congregant engaging in one of the stages and or tasks of grief at church or community.

Application 1: Defining the Stages of Grief

It would be beneficial to the women progressing through this grief support group, to understand the definition of a few emotions that they may experience. As often stated, the cliché ‘You don’t know where you are going, if you don’t know where you been.’ Providing definitions of such words and stages of grief that are often experienced by those who experience loss is vital. Naming and putting meaning to what is experience is crucial to moving forward.

Application 2: Processing through the Tasks of Mourning

To do what is necessary to progress through the grieving process is essential to the process. To progress through the grieving process requires completing tasks in order

to graduate to the next tasks. Grieving is not easy for anyone but assisting the women of the context with the necessary tools to matriculate through grief, can encourage the women it is possible to get on the other side of grief. Using the tasks of mourning as a tool can give the participants support group goals to achieve, while completing and moving on to another task.

Application 3: Participating in and Establishing Rituals

Rituals such as funerals and memorials services hold an essential place in processing grief. End of life rituals can make the reality real for the survivor and pushes the individual towards the grieving process. Not just end of life rituals are important but new rituals can be established as well on anniversaries, birthdays, holidays, and throughout the grieving process rituals can be a helpful tool towards healing from a loss.

Conclusion

In exploring several theories of grief, it has been noted that there are several expressions of grief that seem to be nearly universal to the human family. It is the belief that, given the knowledge and tools outlined in this chapter, the women of County Line Baptist Church will be able to understand and manage their own grief processes more efficiently. It is believed that if the project participants participate in a grief training program, then they will have information and methodology to start the process of addressing their grief.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

The paths each of us experiences in life are as varied as the hairs on our heads. Grief operates similarly. Death of a loved one can affect us differently according to gender, race, culture, and age group. The unaddressed emotional effects can spill over into our physical, spiritual, vocational, and family lives. The context of this project for establishing a grief support group is County Line Baptist Church in Goochland, Virginia—a church created during the Reconstruction Period. The participants from this multi-generational African American rural church are women. Addressing the effects fresh and years-old grief has on the lives of women who take on a substantial amount of responsibility in their families, churches, and vocations as the ones who can handle every crisis with ease along with their daily routines is imperative.

The effects of grief on women adds to the burden of being natural caregivers and the go-to or point person in the family to lead, advise, and resolve conflicts. Wearing the “Super woman” or “Strong Black Woman” title as a gender is unfair when traditionally coming from a race of people who failed to be open about seeking counseling or a support group to properly handle the loss of a loved one. Whether the loss is sudden, expected, due to illness, or due to homicide, when a person dies the surviving family and friends need the tools that offer support and counseling because death can yield emotional trauma.

The goal of this project is to provide the women of County Line Baptist Church with the tools necessary to process grief, to allow them to gain awareness of how to adapt to stages of loss, and to help them to begin to heal from the death of a loved one. The hypothesis established will guide the project of “Hurting Sister: A Woman’s Response to Loss.”

The participants will learn to identify grief and use coping skills to properly process and start healing from the burdens of mourning a loved one. The journey toward healing takes and undetermined amount of time. The women will learn to manage grief by using tools that allow them to continuously heal throughout life when memories, holidays, or special dates involving the decedent triggers sadness. These tools make it possible for them to not emotionally flounder through life and merely exist but thrive instead. These women will learn that it is more than alright to cry, to feel, and to identify their pain.

Methodology

There are several grief models, but this project used a dual grief process model. If the participant oscillates between the two stressors (loss and restoration) may help them process their grief. No singular model encompasses the process and emotions one experiences during the grief process. The two theories used in this project were tools that the participants could use to help them process grief: Stages of Grief that Kübler-Ross and Kessler researched, and Tasks for Mourning defined by Worden. The project provided additional information about grief to the participants as resources. This therapeutic model was used to disseminate information and promote learning new skills.

The model used a centering moment utilizing scriptures, teaching moments, group discussions, surveys, and inventories. The model used various techniques to engage the group participants with teachings.

The participants will learn to understand grief via several scholarly theories, namely Kübler-Ross and Kessler's Stages of Grief, Worden's Task of Mourning, and the Bowlby's Attachment Theory. The cycle of grief fails to occur in order and grief for one woman is not identical to that of other women regardless of whether they experience the same loss of a family member. Grief is not experienced in a monolith. Even the Kübler-Ross Five Stages of Grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance), which she established in 1969 when observing terminally ill patients is not the quintessential step-by-step guide that every human follows when grieving. In contrast, Worden's Task of Mourning offers four tasks to healing grief. The participants will learn about how to incorporate the following Worden's Tasks in their lives: acceptance of loss, adjustment, working through pain, and finding new connections with the deceased. Furthermore, the participants will see how Bowlby's Attachment Theory offers that depending on the relationship one has with the deceased, the way one processes grief and the attachment to the deceased will continue beyond death. These women can become mentors to those future grief ministry attendees when this ministry operates throughout the year and serves as a valuable support to the church. This ministry can become a much-needed introduction to even what counseling outside the church community looks like for those who failed to seek professional help.

The project collected data by using a participant's demographic questionnaire, focused journaling, pre- and post-surveys on how the subjects identify and handle grief,

and an instrument to measure grief called the Revised Grief Experience Inventory (RGEI). The pilot grief support group took place virtually for six weekly sessions on Zoom (due to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic).

Implementation

Context participants volunteered to be part of the grief support group after attending an information session to discuss the project's implementation, purpose, and plan. Ten women participated virtually in the group for six weeks. I assigned each participant in the support group an alias number for each survey as well as submitted written replies and focused journaling entries to protect their identities. The participants signed and submitted confidentiality agreements during the initial session. Data collection occurred by using a pre-session demographic and grief inventory, session responses, focused journaling assignments, along with pre- and post-surveys on grief and the evaluation of the pilot grief support group.

Each weekly session was designed with several components: The first component was an opening prayer and centering moment around scripture reading to ground the evening with the Holy Trinity (God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit). The second component followed prayer with introductions by me, the facilitator, and participants. The third component was a scholarly reference to the week's theme, such as introducing how the school of thought defines elements of grief and the processes taken to heal according to Kübler-Ross and Kessler, the Worden's Tasks of Mourning, and Bowlby's Attachment Theory. The fourth component was discussion and testimonials led by me with participants asked to interject depending on their comfort level (no pressure). The

fifth component included focused journaling homework that allowed each participant to place their thoughts on paper regarding the weekly theme and share—when applicable and if comfortable—a portion of their thoughts. Lastly, each session included a closing prayer to conclude the evening of such emotional work. The subject matter and thoughts released in discussion and focused journal entries is sensitive information that in some cases was never shared with anyone.

Summary of Learning

The mixed methods approach was used to collect the data for evaluation from the sessions. I used RGEI as a quantitative data collection method along with qualitative data collection that utilized, pre- and post-surveys, focused journaling, and project evaluation. The triangulation of this data uses all four data collections. Session One introduced the subject of grief to the support group and participants completed several forms that included the confidentiality agreement and the collection of demographic data and a survey on how grief has impacted the lives of each participant. After reviewing the demographics of the participants in the group, I noticed that the women were all middle-age and within my age group. The participants included no women younger than fifty and no woman was older than sixty-five years old. I wondered if my age had any impact on other younger or older women not participating in the support group. The participants average age was fifty-eight years. All women are active in various church ministries and with six of them serving as ministry leaders or founders (an associate minister, women's ministry founder, church secretary, usher's ministry president and a deaconess in training). The participants average years of collective church membership in this context

yields thirty-four years and two months with a range from two years to sixty years (the life of the participant who is sixty years of age). Most of the women were members of the context since a young age. Below are graphs that show a breakdown of the percentage of participants by age (Figure 1), marital status (Figure 2), and educational backgrounds (Figure 3).

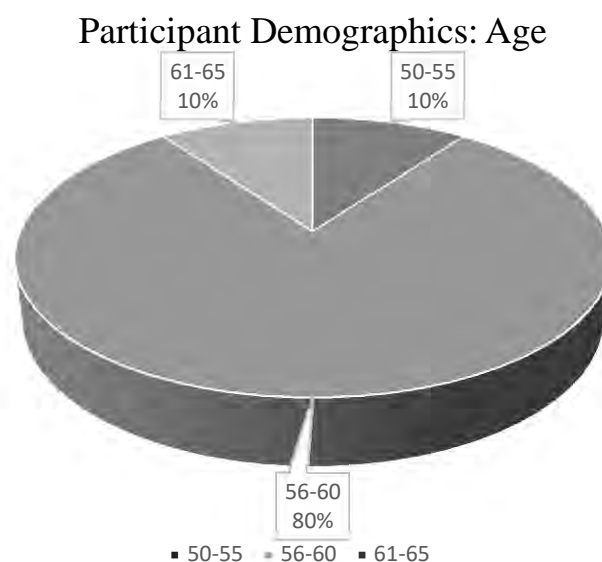


Figure 1. Participant demographics: age

Participant Demographics: Marital Status

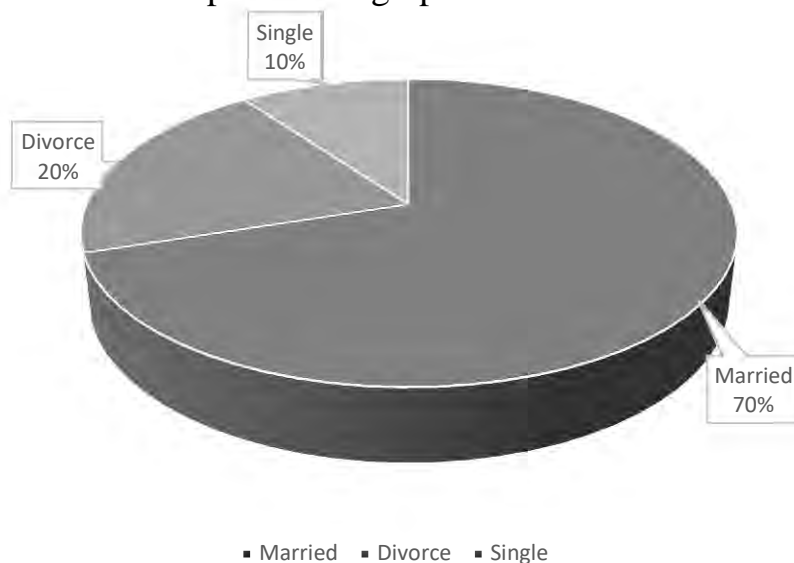


Figure 2. Participant demographics: marital status

Participant Demographics: Education

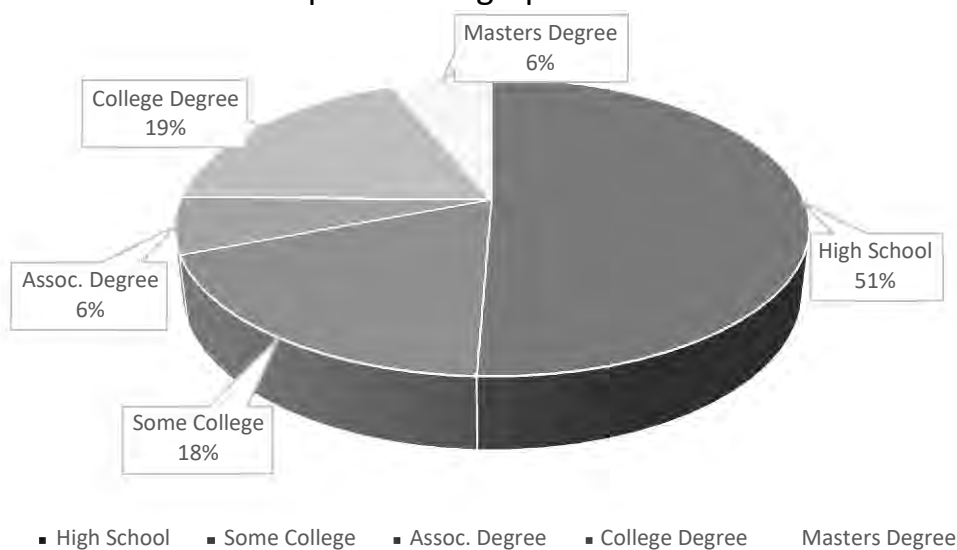


Figure 3. Participant demographics: education

The pre-grief survey yielded some surprising results given a year like 2020 bursting with death due to the COVID-19 virus. Below are graphs that demonstrate how the participants experiences loss regarding the timeframe. Two participants wrote in eight and twenty years respectively next to line item “Last five years.”

(Figure 4). As the support group, starts it is important to know what coping mechanisms if any are being used (Figure 5).

Pre-Grief Survey: How Much Time Has Passed from the Loss of a Loved One

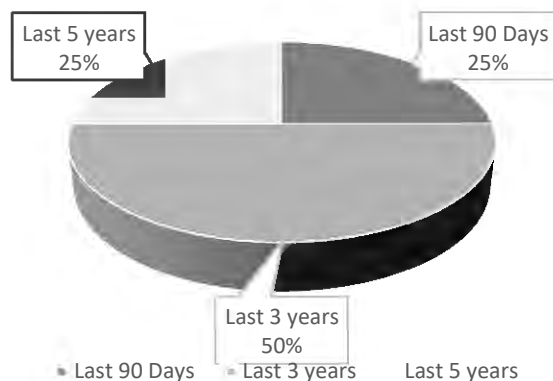


Figure 4. Pre-grief survey: how much time has passed from the loss of a loved one

Pre-Grief Survey: How Participants Coped with Grief

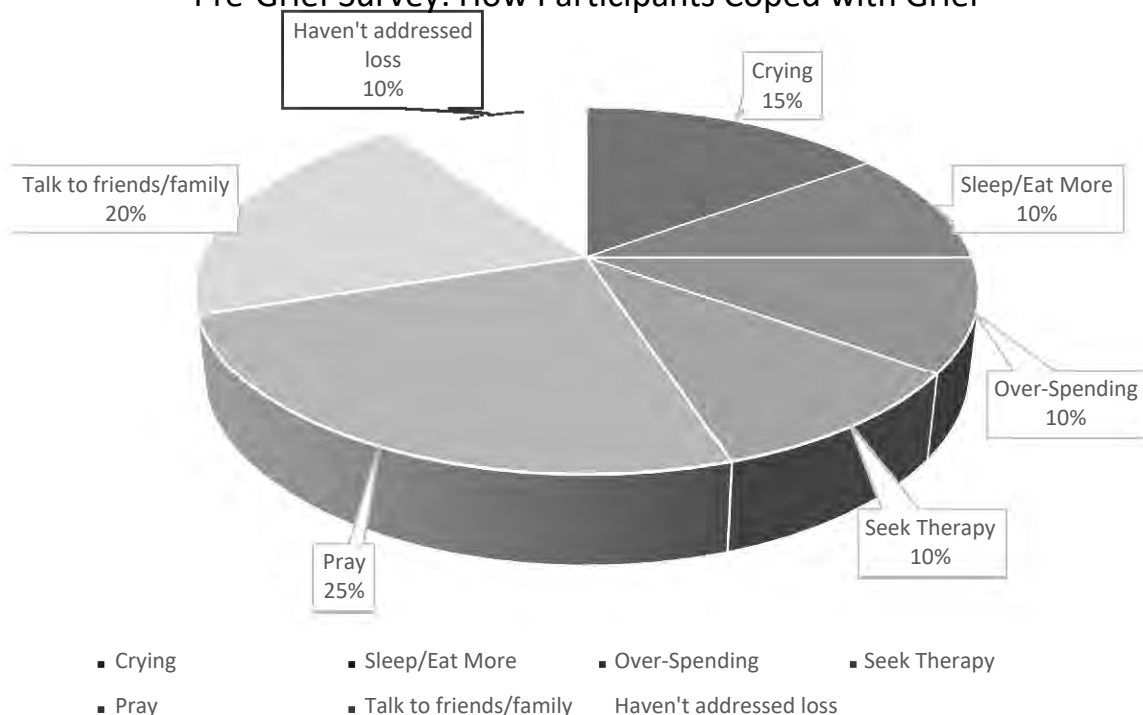


Figure 5. Pre-grief survey: how participants coped with grief

After reviewing the demographics of the participants, I noticed a pattern. I identified the behavior of overeating and overspending. I failed to feel like I specifically

knew enough about potential addictive behaviors, so I provided a name of a local support group that perhaps can aid these participants. Two participants experienced sleeping and eating more respectively, but the graph displays this as one item.

First Session

Week One: What is Grief?

Theme: “It Hurts so bad.”

1. Introduction of the pilot grief ministry and completion of the demographic form and pre-grief survey and setting personal goals while in the group
2. Develop group ground rules
3. Explain “Story-linking” activity.
4. Formal introduction of each participant using the story linking process using a biblical scripture to explain where they are on the grief journey (time is allotted for completion of this activity).

For this first session, as a facilitator I guided the discussion as this was the first time the participants met each other in this context. There was laughter and crying when some participants shared their stories. I felt that this session went well as the support group began the “storming and norming” stages of the group. When discussing the story-linking process with the group, each participant learned how to see themselves in examples from the Bible thereby creating a sense of connection to the Word of God versus it being something that happened in a far-away era in history. I asked participants to take time and write in an activity called “What’s Your Story?” in relation to their personal experiences with coping with grief in the past versus the present. With this process, the ladies selected a scripture or person from the Bible that relates to their experiences with grief and reason for their selection to weave it into their personal story as a way of introduction.

Second Session

Week Two: Stages of Grief Defining Grief, Mourning and Bereavement
Theme: “On the Journey”

1. Introduction on the Kübler-Ross Five Stages of Grief and Stage Six by David Kessler
2. Focused Journaling Assignment: What grief stage have you experienced in your most recent loss?
3. Explain how Bowlby’s Attachment Theory can affect one’s grief process.
4. Homework: Complete (RGEI: The Revised Grief Experience Inventory).

After a centering moment and prayer, the biblical reference for the evening session was John 11:17-37. Each participant read a section of the evening’s Bible verse and expressed how grief affects each person in a moment of self-reflection. Participants noted that there is nothing wrong with crying and showing other emotions when grieving. I noted in this pericope that Mary and Martha’s had different reactions when grieving the loss of their brother Lazarus and processing grief. There is no one way to grieve. The objective for the second session consisted of defining grief, mourning, and bereavement. Although participants may experience similar losses, how each participant reacts is and can be different. By default, experiencing a recent loss can bring up feelings and emotions about a previous loss that participants perhaps failed to realize that they failed to be fully healed from the previous loss. I stressed that “there is no time limit on grief” and made this known during the first session by using a personal reflection. Each person should take the time needed to process grief. One significant point revealed during the session is that any loss can affect anyone at any time (i.e., job, relationship, death of a loved one, pandemic).

This session discussed the Kübler-Ross Five Stages of Grief in depth with definitions and thorough examples of each stage along with the study of terminally ill

patients that birthed these steps.¹ Also, this session discussed an added Stage 6 from David Kessler called finding meaning in your loved one's death.² I explained the "lack of order" for the grief stages while also noting that there is unspecified amount of time allotted for each stage. After providing the participants with Kübler-Ross and Kessler's stages of grief information, the participants identified what stages of grief they experienced. This session allowed the participants to identify and name what they felt as they processed their own personal grief. After this session, participants provided substantial and meaningful responsive feedback from personal accounts and reflections for their focused journaling assignment. Two journal entries demonstrated the amount of transparency the women voiced verbally, and especially in written form to heal. One person wrote that "I went through the stages of denial and depression before finding meaning in the death and accepting this great loss. The mother's passing was totally unexpected and one of those freak accidents where she fell in a creek and drown in less than six inches of water. I know nothing I could do would change God's plan." The second person wrote that "[I am] frustrated with people and some family members after [my] father's death. [I have] an outpouring of bottled-up emotions of disappointments and sometimes guilt."

The graph below gives a breakdown of the participants responding via focused journal assignments to the stage of grief in which they were after I gave an in-depth instruction session about the Kübler-Ross and Kessler Stages of Grief (Figure 6). After

¹ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss* (London, UK: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 2014), 7-28.

² David Kessler, *Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 2019), 14.

receiving this scholarly information, the women substantiated the emotions they felt during their grief journey.

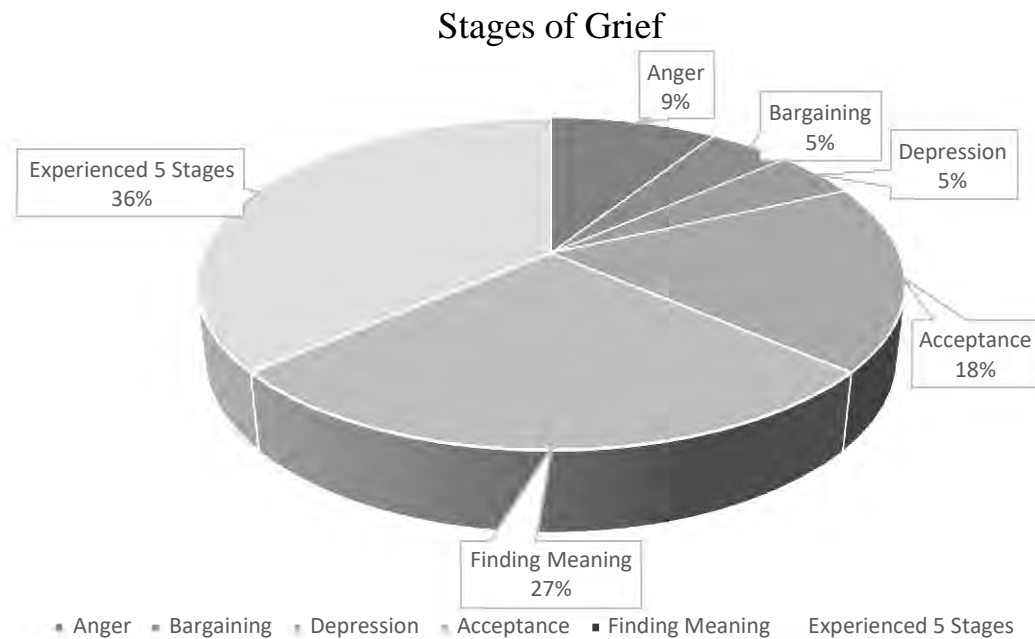


Figure 6. Stages of grief

Thirty-six percent of the women identified that they have experienced the Kübler-Ross Five Stages of Grief followed by the surprising response of women who found meaning in the loss of a loved one. Thirty-seven percent of the women were transparent in stating that they experienced a few key stages versus going through the five stages (i.e., anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance). I expanded on a question posed by a participant who questioned God and asked why it may hurt so bad when a loved one passes, which led to the discussion of defining Bowlby's Attachment Theory. I followed with an explanation on how certain relationships can cause one to become attached to another person. That attachment causes one to feel deeply when there is a change in the relationship such as death. That detachment may even cause complicated grief for some individuals in the grieving process.

I gave participants a homework assignment to complete the Revised Grief Experience Inventory (RGEI) survey using a Likert scale that measures the grief experience inclusive of death and non-death losses.³ The RGEI consists of twenty-two general statements that measure how one handles grief experiences using four domains: existential concerns (life seems empty and barren), depression (I frequently feel depressed), feelings of tension and guilt (I frequently experience angry feelings and I have feelings of guilt because I was spared and the deceased was taken), and physical distress (my arms and legs feel very heavy, and I am not feeling healthy). I instructed participants to read each general statement and circle the response that corresponds to how well they agree or disagree with each statement. Persons are to provide responses quickly without much in-depth thought because it is about ones first impressions. There are no right or wrong answers. The participants indicated on a six-point scale how much they agreed or disagreed with each statement on the RGEI by circling whether there was a slight, moderate, or strong agreement or disagreement towards the twenty-two statements. The six-point range for agreement and disagreement along with the twenty-two statements are as follows:

Agreement: 1 = slight; 2 = moderate; 3 = strong

Disagreement: 4 = slight; 5 = moderate; 6 = strong

1. I tend to be more irritable with others since the death of my loved one
2. I frequently experience angry feelings
3. My arms and legs feel very heavy
4. I have feelings of guilt because I was spared and the deceased was taken
5. I feel lost and helpless
6. I have had frequent headaches since the death
7. I cry easily
8. Concentrating on things is difficult
9. I feel extremely anxious and unsettled

³ E. Lev, B. H. Munro, and R. McCorkle, "A Shortened Version of an Instrument Measuring Bereavement," *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 30, no. 3 (1993): 213-26.

10. Sometimes I have a strong desire to scream
11. Life has lost its meaning for me
12. I am not feeling healthy
13. I frequently feel depressed
14. I have the feeling that I am watching myself go through the motions of living
15. Life seems empty and barren
16. I have frequent mood changes
17. Small problems seem overwhelming
18. I have lost my appetite
19. I seem to have lost my energy
20. I seem to have lost my self-confidence
21. I am usually unhappy
22. I am awake most of the night

Nine participants completed the RGEI. Table 1 records the total scores and number of statements with which they agreed and disagreed.

Table 1. RGEI scores per participants

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Score Totals on the RGEI per Participants chronological order	101	86	72	69	73	125	100	83	NR	80

***NR = Participant did not submit RGEI N=87.7

Depending on how much they either agreed or disagreed with the RGEI general statements participants' common responses led to their labeling as members of either Group A or Group B. Group A participants have the most agreement statements and the least disagreements. Group A has several agreement statements in common when it comes to their emotional and physical statuses at the time when I introduced the RGEI and participants completed it during week two. Five participants agreed with anywhere from eight to sixteen statements, yet three of them agreed with four statements that if left unaddressed could lead to a further downward spiral of depression.

Again, participants' responses could suggest depression depending on the value of each statement with which they agree when, for example, it comes to feeling depressed,

unhealthy, unhappy, empty, or barren. In particular if the participants agreed “strongly” with each statement they may want to consider further counseling or support group options. Two of the women admitted to slightly agreeing on statement 13, which states “I frequently feel depressed.” The third of the three women left that same statement blank. I am unsure if this was an oversight or if she purposely skipped over this statement. As mentioned, when not addressed, this emotion can balloon and cause depression.

Like Group A, members of Group B (three participants) had the most disagreement statements, from twenty-one to all twenty-two. Two of the participants disagreed with twenty-one of the statements and one lone participant disagreed with all twenty-two statements showing that they felt the least depressed, unhealthy, unhappy, etc.—the opposite of Group A. One-third (one participant) of Group B strongly disagreed on each of the above statements as well as fifteen other items. This lone participant disagreed on all twenty-two RGEI items. Two-thirds, or the remaining two participants disagreed on twenty-one statements. Both strongly disagreed on statement “13. I frequently feel depressed.” Between the three women, two of them strongly disagreed and one slightly disagreed on statement “16. I have frequent mood changes.” These two participants disagreed on twenty-one RGEI items with one woman slightly disagreeing on eighteen items, and the other woman strongly disagreeing on fifteen items. One of these women who disagreed on twenty-one items surprisingly agreed with three members of Group A on statement 4, which states “I have feelings of guilt because I was spared and the deceased was taken.”

Third Session

Week Three: Types of Grief and Coping Tools

Theme: “Now What?”

1. Define other types of grief: disenfranchised, complicated, and secondary
2. Introduce coping skills that may be used to help process grief.

The week’s theme was Now What? The group read Luke 13:10-17 after sharing a reflective moment. This preceded an open discussion on the different types of grief and asking the women “How does grief feel?” The session ended with “Signs and Symptoms of Grief” and the closing prayer. Session three was more of a group discussion than instructor led. As the facilitator, I provided definitions of types of grief and coping tools and then allowed the group to provide how they believed grief feels. This session went well because it again allowed participants to name their emotions and take ownership of those feelings as being acceptable to experience.

Fourth Session

Week 4: The Importance of Participating in and Establishing Rituals

Theme: The Holidays are Coming

1. Explain how participating in rituals are useful to process grief.
2. Establishing new rituals can be helpful in processing grief.
3. As an African American in the United States what so-called cultural end of life rituals (i.e., homegoing celebration) do you identify with that may be helpful to process grief?
4. Focused Journaling Assignment: Do you think you would like to start a new or continue a ritual that will help you process your grief of a loved one? If so, what ritual and why?)

After the group read Mark 5:38-43 during their centering moment, I asked each participant to check in by reviewing and sharing set personal goals related to the grief support group that they set during the initial session. I introduced the fourth week’s

theme, “The Holidays are coming,” leading into a discussion on the importance of participating in rituals and/or establishment of new rituals if desire. The session transitioned into my sharing information on the meaning of end-of-life rituals (i.e., wake, funeral and repass) with emphasis on comforting elements and assisting with processing grief was shared. I provide an instructional session on types of rituals the women could participant in. In the focused journal assignment, nine of the ten participants focused on journaling on how they would take steps forward to establish new rituals or continue to participate in already incorporated rituals (Figure 7) as individuals or as an extended family unit to memorialize loved ones:

Participants New Rituals

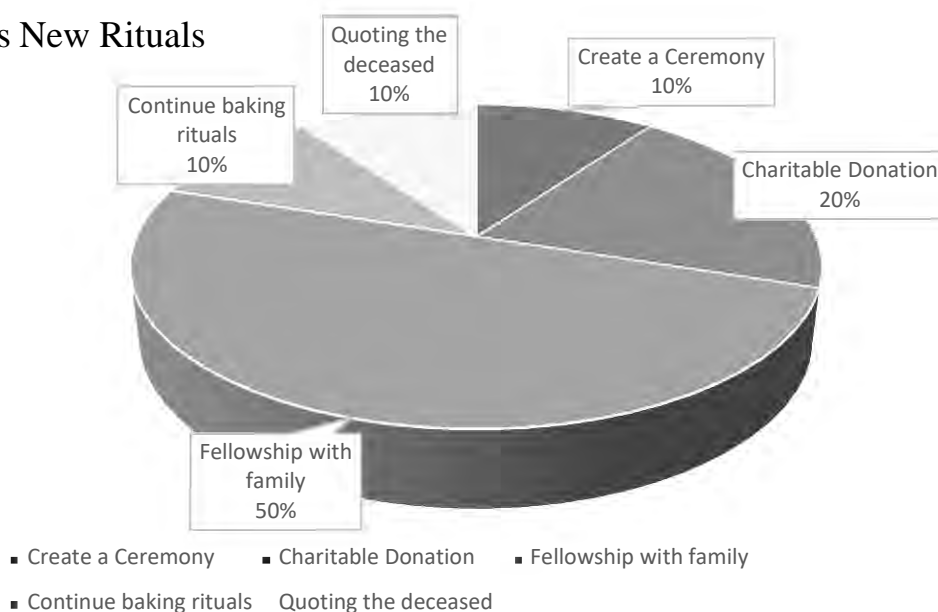


Figure 7. Participants new rituals

Three participants listed the following ways to keep the memory of a loved one alive, respectively: “Quoting their mom with her favorite anecdotes or humor,” “Creating a ceremony to honor their loved one (i.e., lighting of candles, reflections, prayers and blowing the candles out as all gather for fellowship),” and “Not starting a new ritual, one participant wants to continue with keeping her mother’s memory alive by baking

homemade pound cakes and the home cooked meals she provides for her family, like her late mother did for years.” The session started with a serious undertone as the meaning of rituals were discussed. The session then ended with a comical undertone as the group discussed common African American end-of-life rituals. This session did not reveal any new or specific information about end-of-life rituals per the group discussion.

Fifth Session

Week Five: Grieving as an African American Woman
Theme: Being Super Woman (A Strong Black Woman)

1. Identify how being an African American in the United States (Virginia) impacts the grieving process.
2. Discuss with support group being an African American woman in the United States, given the history of your race, how have cultural norms affected the grieving process for you as an African American and Woman?
3. Focused Journaling Assignment: Do you personally think being an African American and a woman impact how you personally grieve and why?)

The fifth session opened with centering moment. Participants shared reflections on the Bible verses Genesis 21:1-21. I, as the facilitator, provided the context of the Bible verse about how God notices Hagar and what she experiences as God notices us as we deal with grief. I led the discussion on the many “hats” roles women portray (i.e., Mother, grandmother, wife, sister, employee, auntie, sister friend, and employee, church member). During the session, I played the song “I’m Every Woman” by Chaka Khan to assist in displaying these roles as I stacked different hats on my head to represent the roles women often wear. I explained with group discussion the many positions women often hold that may prevent healthy self-care.

I asked the participants about how cultural norms and race disparities affect their grieving process if at all. I further provided statistics of the increasing homicide rate in

Virginia as it relates to the African American community and how the homicide rate may affect how African American in this locality grieves. The group discussed how the increasing homicide rate may cause many to become numb to hearing about death. I led the group in a discussion on the terms “Super Woman” or “Strong Black Woman.” The group provided the definition that a “Strong Black Woman” is an African American woman that handles everything, aids everyone else, and appears that she “has it all together.” I further explained how that definition can relate to not taking the time to seek the help that is needed to take care for oneself and process grief in a healthy manner. That discussion led to a discussion with the women that there is nothing wrong with being a “Strong Black Woman,” as long as the “Strong Black Woman” is one who takes the healthy steps to take care of herself when needed and not feeling guilty for doing so even when it comes to processing grief.

The focused journal assignment entries on this weekly theme were practically identical with submissions from 60% of the participants stating how they agreed that historically Black women are considered the “Super Woman,” “caretakers,” or the “Strong Black woman.” Thirty percent of the women failed to submit written commentary with a lone 10% offering their opinion of contrast to the traditional viewpoint (Figure 8).

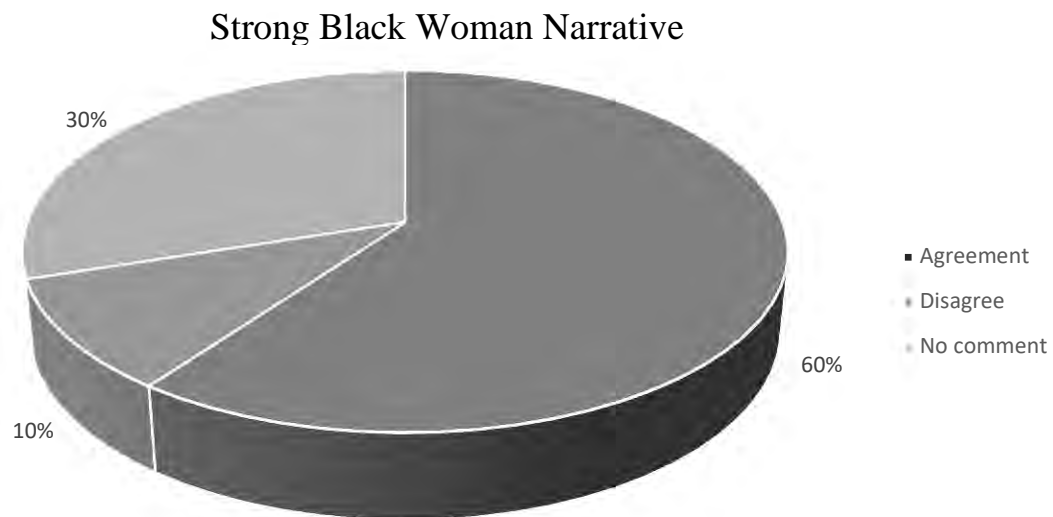


Figure 8. The Strong Black Woman narrative

Below are excerpts from the journal entries with one response of dissent, professing not wanting to live up to being a superwoman. One respondent wrote that “Black women are always taking care of everyone and all situations that arise, placing herself last, if not at all.” Another participant wrote that

As an African American woman, I think we are expected to do more, be more and not bend or break. I think historically expectations [were] to be a wife, mother, caregiver, cook, maid and then you come last. This happened (and this is my opinion) on biblical interpretation that God will make a way and feeling it was wrong to think of yourself first ... I am not a Super woman and I’m not going to try.

A third person wrote “I feel that I am strong and have been raised to be independent.” In addition, another woman wrote “Yes, being a woman and a Black woman, I’ve understood that we are the ones who are usually strong for our children and family. Therefore, we turn to religion and rely on Faith, Spirituality and Prayer and with that we can survive.” A fifth participant added that “As a strong Black woman, in the past I have suppressed my feelings/grief to help others get through the day...now I know that it is

okay to pause, reflect, heal and take care of myself.” Another reported that “African American woman handle grief differently. We are supposed to be strong.” Lastly, in her journal a participant wrote that “Strong Black Women are to handle things without showing emotions or asking for help. I’m a strong Black woman and there’s nothing wrong with me asking for help. We experience grief longer. We talk less about grief or seek treatment.”

I shared that not only is it appropriate to grieve, but it is also a form of self-care. This is how a woman becomes a strong woman by taking care of herself and seeking help from a support group and professional counseling when needed; it is about grieving healthily or grieving well. This was the most difficult session to facilitate. I assumed that with the participants being African American women, they would have a lot of comments and responses concerning the topics discussed in this session, but that was untrue. The reason was unclear, but I think that perhaps I had more interest in the topic than the women in the support group. Several women stated they observed how to be a “strong Black woman” from the women in their lives.

Sixth Session

Week Six: Closing Session- Theme: Wrap It Up

1. Explain Worden’s Tasks of Mourning
2. Explain how to move forward in starting the healing process of grief
3. Focused Journaling: Which task(s) are you committing to working on as a future goal?

Beginning the session with scripture Psalms 139:14, I led the session by defining and giving practical examples of applying William Worden’s four tasks of mourning: accept reality of loss, process the pain of grief, adjust to the world without the deceased, and

find a way to remember the deceased while moving forward in life.⁴ I asked participants to identify role changes that occurred in their personal lives due to the death of a loved one. According to Worden, there are changes in family dynamics, accepting new roles, and discovering new powers within oneself to handle new challenges. The support group completed the session by providing a list of healthy ways by which they could move forward to cope in the grieving process.

Summation

The project gave the women of County Line Baptist Church that participated in the implementation of this project the tools necessary to start and continue processing their grief. The losses experienced by the participants in this grief support group range from death of parents, sibling, an adult child, spouse, cousin, in-laws, and a decades-old friendship. How the participants now respond to loss per the post-grief survey that offers incite that is both reassuring and surprising.

The results of the post-survey provide a difference in tone and emotion versus the generic pre-survey responses. The project gave the women the opportunity to acquire tools (definition of grief, stages of grief and tasks of mourning, etc.) to start or continue to process their grief, to discuss with me as the facilitator and the other women and self-reflect by writing thoughts in a focused journal. The pre- and post-survey initial question required the women to share the timeframe when they experienced loss. The women came into this support group with grief as fresh as ninety days and as far back as twenty

⁴ J. William Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*, 5th ed. (New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, 2018), 39-40, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=5355008>.

years. One woman was even in the middle of fresh grief during the sessions with the loss of a family member.

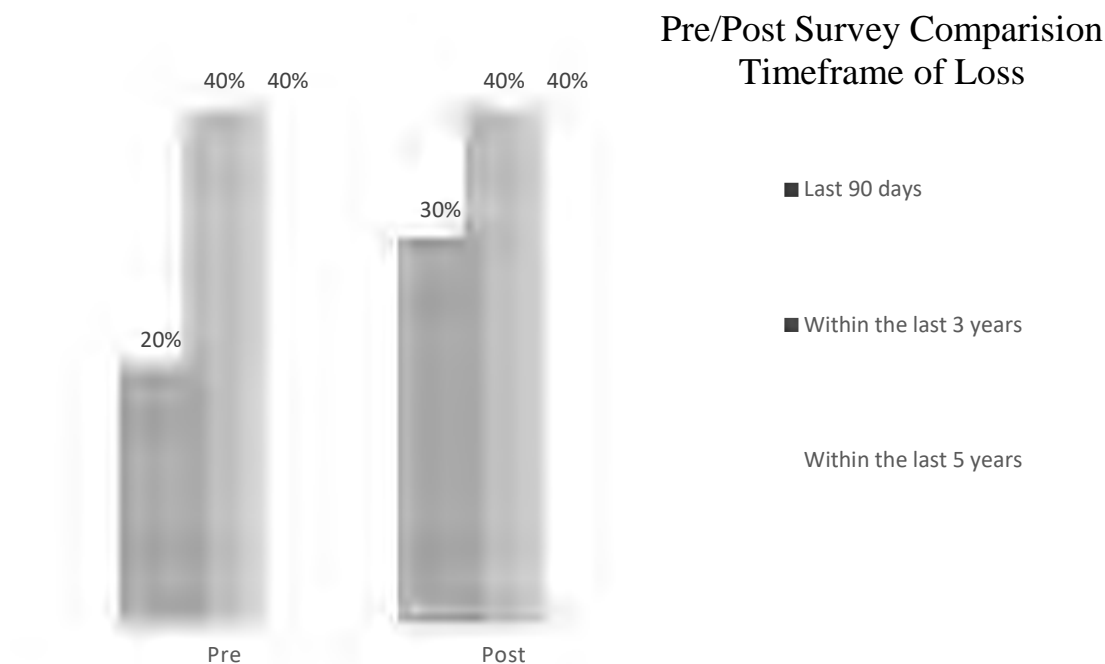


Figure 9. Pre/Post survey comparison: timeframe of loss

On the pre-survey two participants wrote in eight and twenty years respectively next to the line item “Within the last 5 years.” For the post-survey, 30% of the participants checked two losses: a cousin in the last ninety days who died during their participation in the grief support group and her husband’s death within the last five years. The pre-survey results show most of the women experienced the loss of loved ones, yet the post-survey revealed 100% of the women dealt with this same loss, regardless of when the deaths occurred. Time fails to dictate that one grieves for a finite period. When not addressed, grief can hamper one from living an emotionally healthy life.

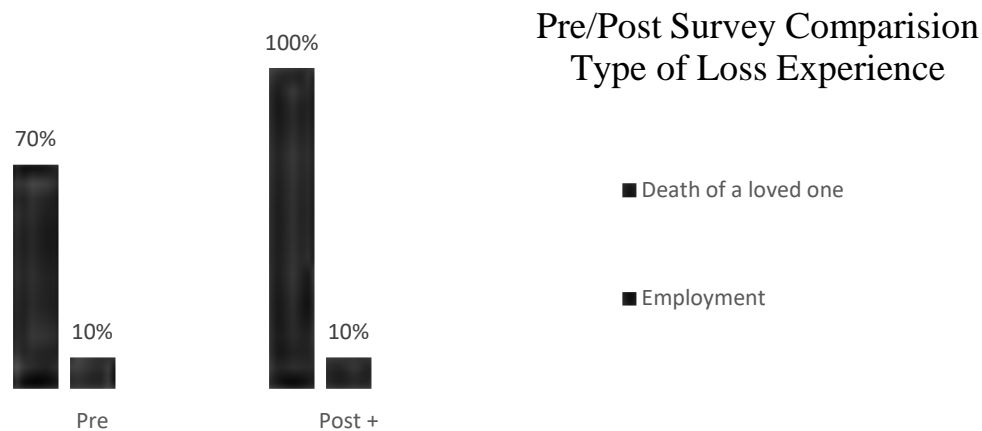


Figure 10. Pre/Post survey comparison: type of loss experience

As a point of clarification for the question regarding the length of time that passed since experiencing the loss of a loved one, two participants left this item blank. Participant four experienced the unexpected loss of her mother three years ago, and Participant eight lost her mother twenty years ago. All ten participants checked they grieved the death of a loved one, with one participant also checking that she grieved the loss of employment. This post-survey observation explains how a participant experienced a secondary loss along with the loss of a loved one.

Results

The response to grief takes on different forms whether you validate the behavior or not. Not everybody cries, prays, read scriptures, or want to talk to family or friends. People who overeat or over shop more than normal after the death of a loved one may be grieving too. All behaviors must be named and called out as the burden barriers they are in our lives. These and others are responses to grief that was shared in this project support group. Pre-survey data shows the healthiest outlet that most of the participants used for

support came in the form of talking to a counselor or therapist (30%), talking to family and friends (50%), and prayer (70%) as opposed to a small percentage who outwardly turned to both healthy and/or unhealthy alternatives. That small percentage of participants admit that they cried more than usual (40%) and failed to address the loss along with eating, sleeping, and overspending more than usual (20% each, respectively). Crying is nothing of which one should be ashamed. Yet failing to address the crying as well as failing to address the loss all together and masking such pain with food, over-sleeping and emotional shopping may not be the right answers. The participants post-survey responses to responding to loss shows a vast difference with prayer leading the way at 80%, followed by talking to friends and family at 60% (Figure 11). This represents the influence of receiving, responding, and being nurtured by the information in the six-week grief support group.

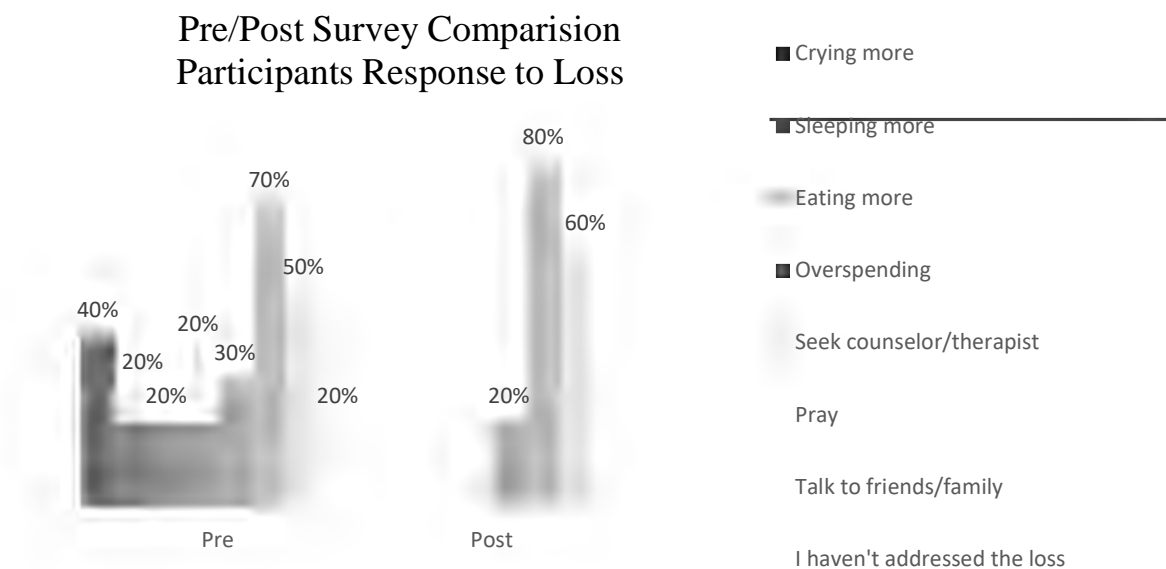


Figure 11. Pre/Post survey comparison: participants response to loss

The pre- and post-surveys responses to grief show an incredible gap for the better. It demonstrates the ability to receive information and open one's mind to a new way of

handling an issue such as grief and relying on faith coupled with scholarly research. Sixty percent of the women, post-grief support, state that they “can handle” grief. The response of anger and feeling overwhelmed decreased by 10%, while feeling of numbness or nothing increased by ten percent. Again, most responses on how grief is handled, pre- versus post-survey responses is an amazing testimony to the information the women implemented because of their participation in the grief support group (Figure 12).

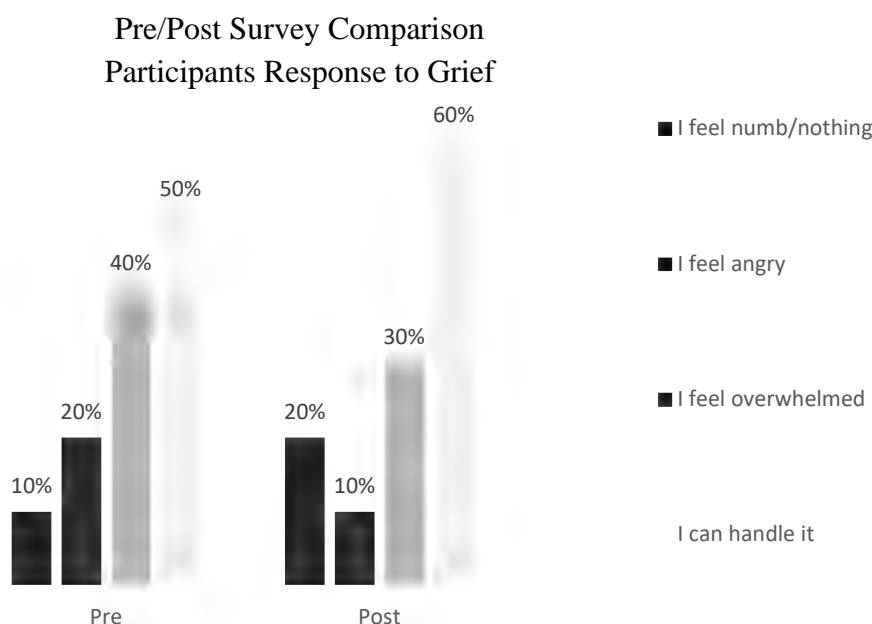


Figure 12. Pre/Post survey comparison: participants response to grief

When the participants were asked to write in their responses for how they cope with grief, the response of pray and read scriptures led the way in the pre-survey and increased by 10% in the post-survey. Talking to family and friends in the pre-survey saw a dramatic increase in the post-survey from 10% to 60% with more than one participant sharing their new resource of having the grief support group sisters to talk too. Fifty percent of the participants also selected multiple options such as praying, reading scriptures, and talking to family and friends as a new source of coping (Figure 13).

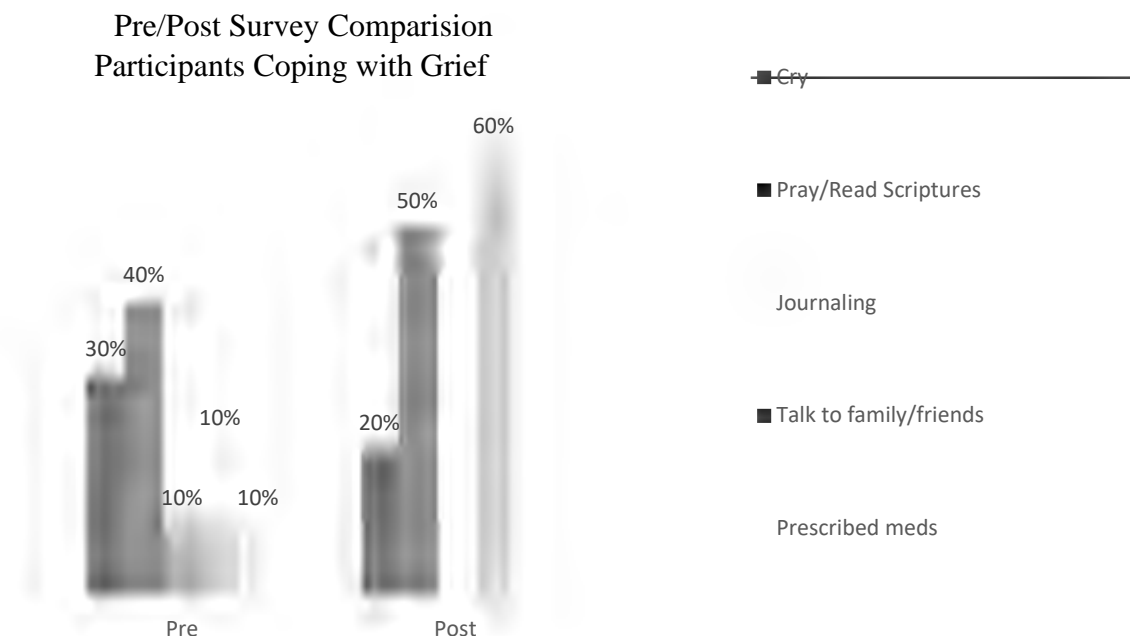


Figure 13. Pre/Post survey comparison: participants coping with grief

Again, it is very impressive to see in the post-survey results that the participants lean on the strength of friends and family to talk too when grieving. Especially with newfound friends from the grief support group. When 50% of the participants selected the option “I can handle it” when responding to question 4, two of the women responded to question 5 (“describe how they cope with grief”) with “praying, reading scriptures and talking to friends and family” along with the outward emotional “crying, keeping busy, overeating and fighting sleepiness,” which is the antithesis of being able to handle grief. The lone participant who grieves from the loss of a loved one and employment responds they “can handle it.” With this question 4 response they are transparent in stating “I don’t cope with grief” and they evade coming to terms with their grief by “trying to keep going.” The pre-survey revealed that 60% of the participants in this grief support group never sought grief counseling or therapy. Yet the post-survey showed an even 50% split

between those who sought a therapist versus those women who failed to do so (Figure 14).

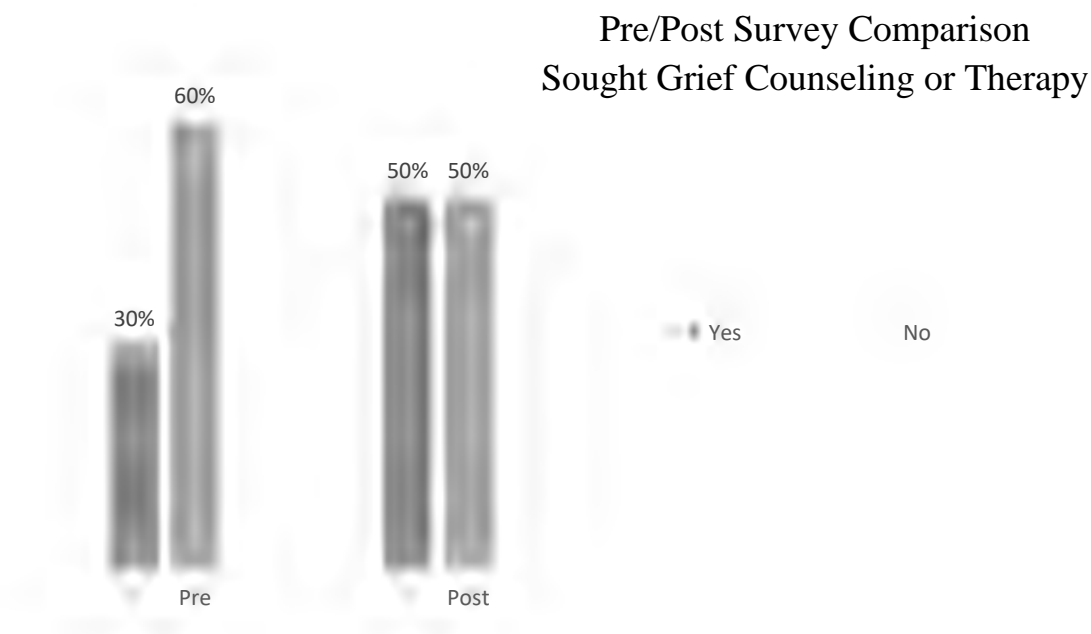


Figure 14. Pre/Post survey comparison: sought grief counseling or therapy

The representation above of African American women who failed to seek professional counseling is in keeping with the historical precedence that as a community for whatever reason African Americans may not seek help. More importantly if professional counseling is sought how many individuals normalize—generationally—the importance of attending professional therapy. At the least as an alternative, if church members feel comfortable participating in a church offered grief support group, it is a stamp of approval for those attending that mental health is a priority and help is accepted.

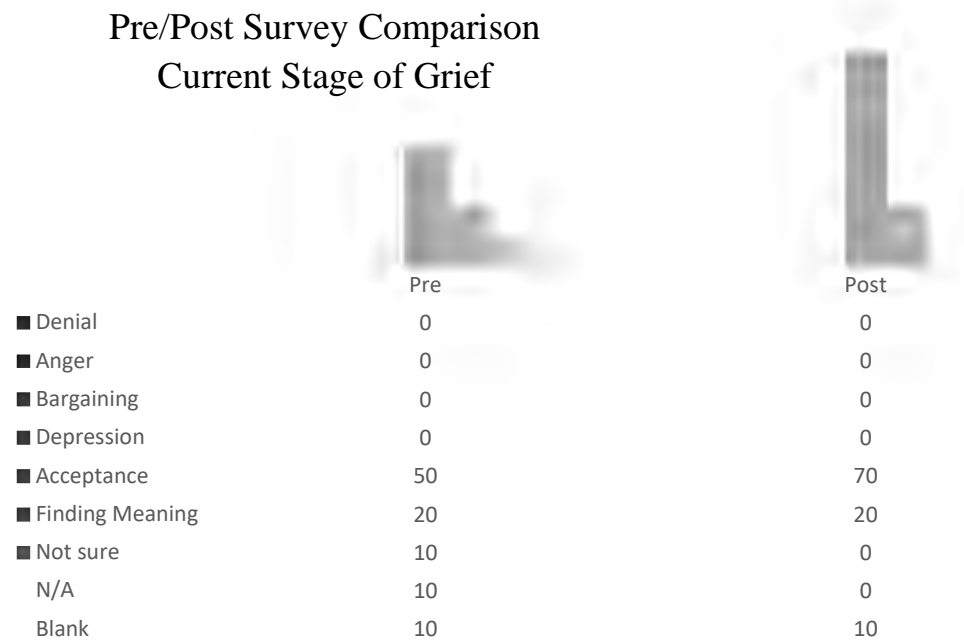


Figure 15. Pre/Post survey comparison: current stage of grief

In the pre-survey, 70% of the participants admitted to being in either the stage of “accepting” their loss and “moving forward” towards healing from a loss. I captured these results before the participants learned about the stages of grief, which is impressive. Two participants were in the finding meaning stage. This included one participant dealt with the loss of her father (eight years ago) and now caring for her mother who has Alzheimer’s. The second participant admitted to trying to understand the loss of her loved one. Perhaps two participants left this inquiry with a “N/A” and blank, respectively, because their losses were three and twenty years ago because they provided no responses or explanations as to why they left the question unanswered. That according to the post-survey, a combined 90% of the participants admitted to finding acceptance and meaning during their grief journey is a testimony of the impact on these participants’ lives due in part to the grief support group. How much the grief support group benefited these women when reviewing the responses to how dealing with grief affected their relationship with

God is telling. The pre-survey shows that 70% of the women dependent on God increased to 100% in the post-survey (Figure 16).

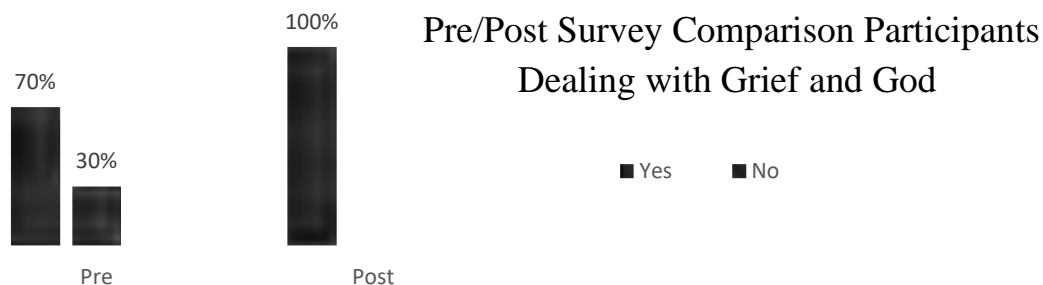


Figure 16. Pre/Post survey comparison: participants dealing with grief and God

Again, the grief support group gave these participants a reminder of the importance of relying on God and the scholarly components on grieving opened their hearts and minds to healing from loss. One hundred percent of the participants stated that dealing with grief affected their relationships with God one way or another. These responses were different than the pre-survey responses because it showed true relationship with God versus God being an untouchable entity. These women were transparent in saying they talk with God several times a day and that God is in control of their lives.

The pre- and post-surveys responses on if grief created brokenness in the lives of these participants failed to change in the affirmative, instead staying steady at seventy percent. The only difference was the obvious one participant who failed to answer this inquiry in the pre-survey and having all ten participants answer this question in the post-survey, even with two responding that grief failed to create brokenness in their lives (Figure 17).

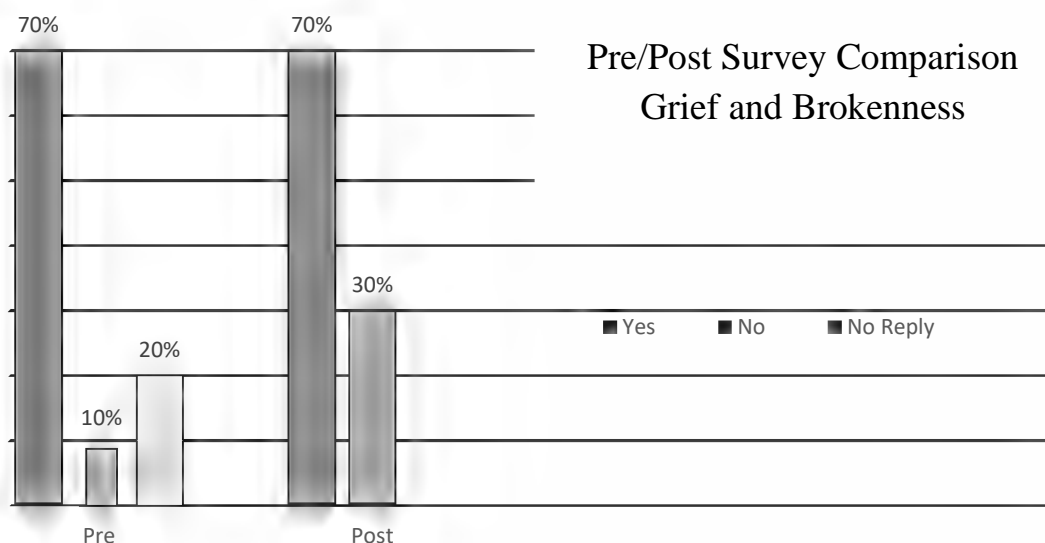


Figure 17. Pre/Post survey comparison: grief and brokenness

The post-survey data shows that 30% of the participants responded “No” with only one participant explaining their reply as not being broken but having “sadness...serves as a reminder how precious and fragile life is.” Seventy percent of the participants stated that they felt brokenness after the death of a loved one. The transparency these women share is quite refreshing when you think of how these same women for the most part never sought a counselor nor therapist to heal from grief. To see that most of them admit that grief created brokenness in their lives is a huge step towards peeling back the layers on how grief burdened their lives. These next three graphs will show how the participants answered how mourning the loss of a loved one affected their relationships in their family, in their circle of friends, and in their church family (Figure 18, Figure 19, and Figure 20). Again, participants provided very transparent replies in the pre- and post-surveys.

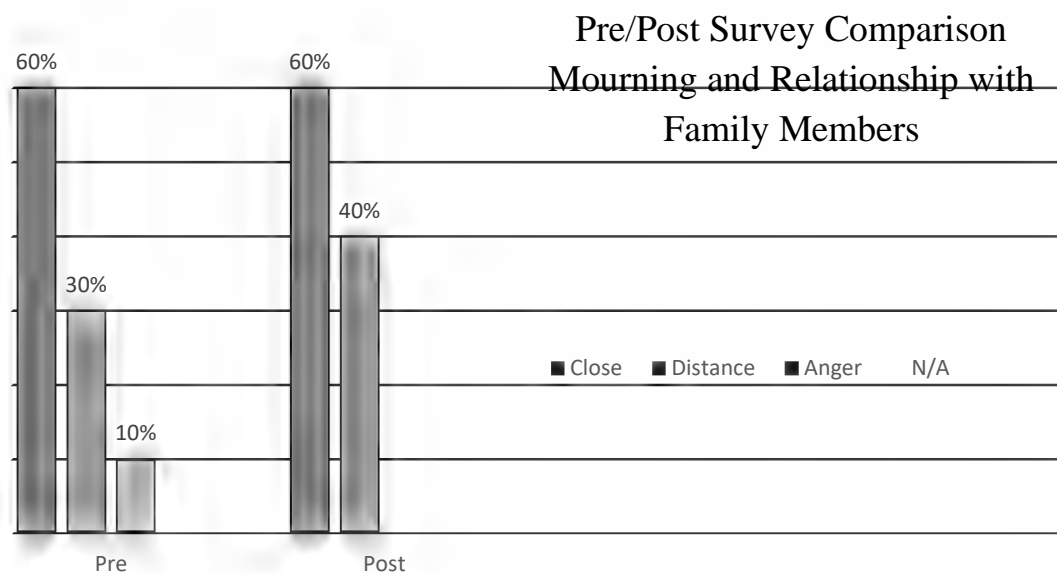


Figure 18. Pre/Post survey comparison: mourning and relationship with family members

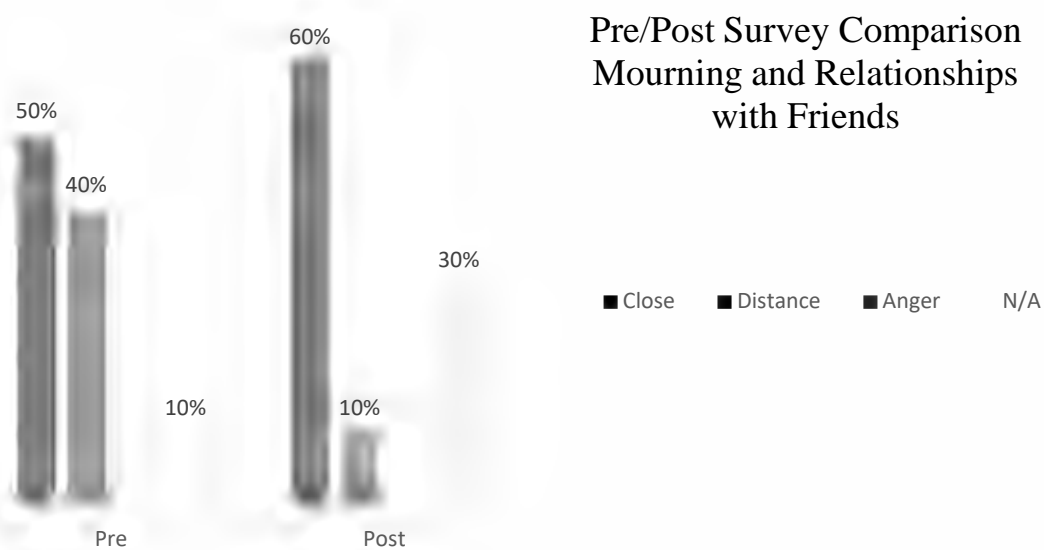


Figure 19. Pre/Post survey comparison: mourning and relationships with friends

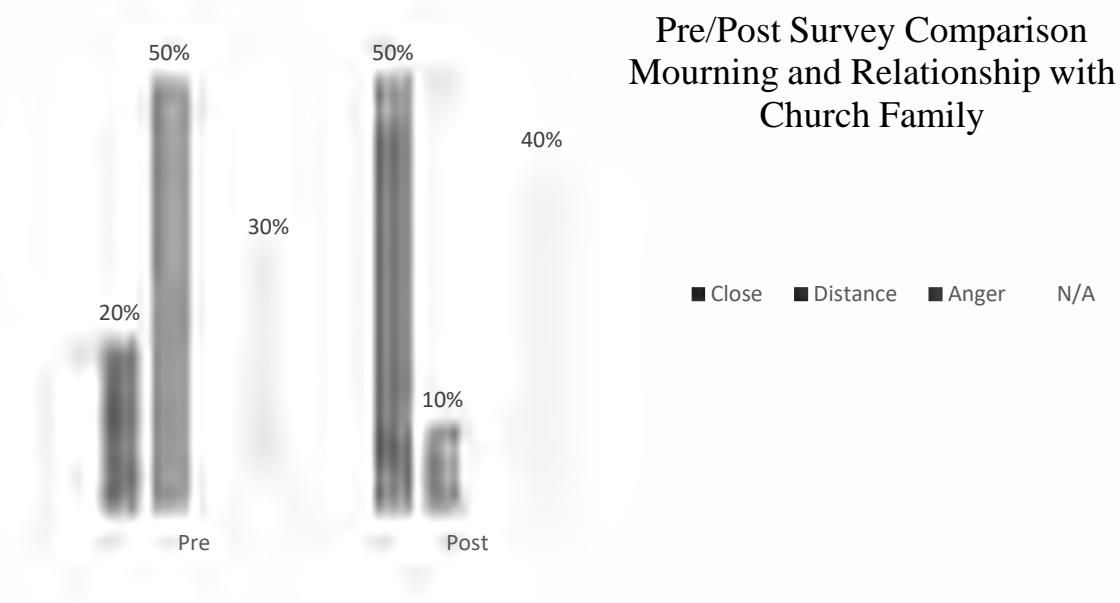


Figure 20. Pre/Post survey comparison: mourning and relationship with church family

Participants provided pre-survey replies to why the church should be a source of healing during the initial session of grief support. They wrote their responses from a range of standpoints from generic statements to detailed reasons targeting support and love needed when healing from grief. Every participant agreed during the post-survey that the church is most definitely a resource of healing for all who are on the emotional rollercoaster that comes with the sudden or expected death of a loved one as recent as ninety days and as long ago as twenty years. Each participant explained in this post-survey their reasons that aligned with people who completed a six-week grief support group. Each post-survey provides evidence of emotional growth as seen in the written responses that become more and more personalized and filled with how much a relationship with God was re-established or built as the foundation for healing from grief.

What a difference attending grief counseling makes when you not only see the 100% result for both pre- and post-surveys but review of a few of the explanations given

as to why the participants are open to healing from grief. One respondent answered “yes” to question 12 in the pre-survey before stating in the post-survey that “You have to heal from grief because you can make your own self sick. My healing deals with talking about my son and I still talk to him (LOL). Another first answered this question with “Yes, the ability to accept the loss and celebrate the life of the loved one. Remembering the good and not so good times and funny moments. Being able to cry sometimes and knowing it’s ok to do so,” before stating in the post-survey that “being able to function as normally as possible. Understand it’s ok to cry if a special memory or you see an item that reminds you of that person.” In the pre-survey, one participant stated that “Being able to cope and learning how to process my grief,” and at the conclusion of the project stated “Yes, through attending grief counseling through my church or women resource – through talking, listening and sharing with others.” A fourth participant noted at the beginning that “Healing can take on many forms – talking, crying – but it must be with someone you can trust,” but after the project she stated that “After completion of this panel (grief support group) I think I will better understand the grieving process and know that it is process. No right or wrong way (to grieve).” Lastly, one woman replied “Being able to reconnect to and pray openly to God” in response to this question on the pre-survey, before concluding that “this class was a great help for me. Just talking helps and knowing it’s ok to talk and share or help someone else cope.” The pre-survey is stark in its responses that the participants were all about having someone to talk too, specifically, someone who would listen and not judge what is said. Praying and wanting an apology are responses that followed (Figure 21). True growth is evident when 90% of the post-survey represents the participants ability to seek a variety of resources from prayer, God,

support system, accepting the loss and/or using the tools provided during the grief support that will help them handle their loss.

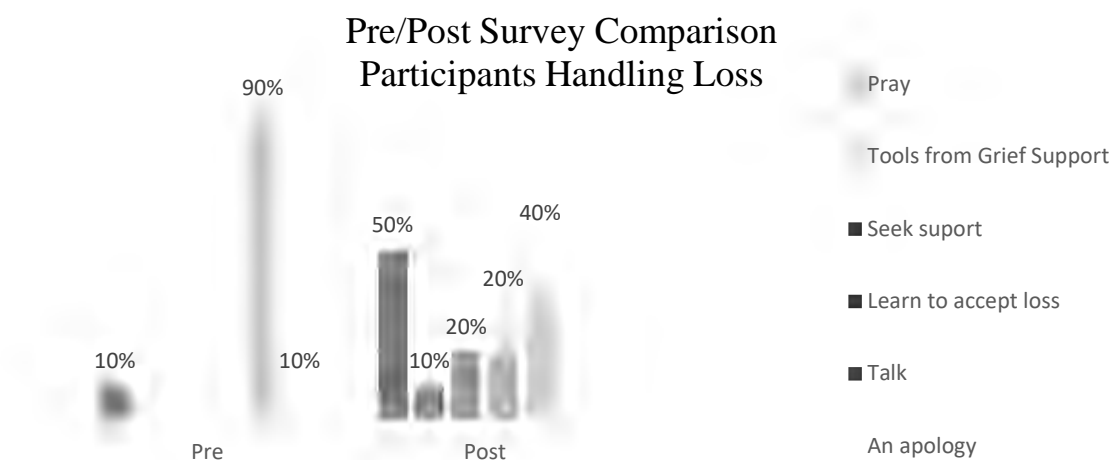


Figure 21. Pre/Post survey comparison: participants handling loss

Celebration of Life Event

A socially distant thirty-minute Celebration of Life ceremony took place at the context County Line Baptist Church parking lot Sunday after Worship Service. The church family was invited to join participants of the grief support group in the event. I led the celebration with the assistance of other ministries and ministers of the church. The ceremony included several items such as lighting of candle (in memory of the deceased loved one) and showing a PowerPoint presentation of deceased loved one pictures with instrumental music playing in the background. The ceremony also included a Prayer of Comfort (members speaking the names of deceased loved one), a musical offering, words of hope, and releasing different color balloons at the end of ceremony into the air (permitting deceased loved one to live on in eternity). No formal survey was provided for this event. Grief Support participants did mention that the ceremony was much needed, even individuals who did not participant in the group provided a similar response. This

event allowed the mourners and church family to come together safely to grieve and support each other during the COVID-19 restrictions.

Limitations

COVID-19

The year 2020 has been an unprecedented time where the world experienced the effects of a virus—COVID-19—that failed to discriminate, but rather freely traveled from one continent to another, targeting all in its way. With that, life still had to proceed with institutions, organizations and businesses pivoting to a new normal. Virtual funeral services along with a limited number of family and friends in attendance via funeral home and grave side cemeteries became the norm. Traditional end-of-life rituals being cut short and being omitted due to the fear of catching the deadly virus put a damper on the process of grieving. Some individuals were not able to view their loved one's body, which for some individuals this prohibited closure. Even the gathering for the participants in this grief support group was altered. Instead of meeting in an intimate in-person setting, we had to opt to meet virtually. Three participants mentioned they "stay" to themselves; therefore, the in-person setting perhaps had a positive impact for them. Due to virtually meeting, I insured that all items were provided to each participant that were needed for each session along with encouraging items as well. I mailed all items to each participant with self-addressed envelopes included for them to mail to me necessary surveys, the questionnaire, and focused journal entries.

Intragroup Differences

The most notable differences within the participant pool are the demographic of age followed by thoughts on being an African American woman, the family-church connection, and location. The median age of the ten participants was fifty-eight years and seven months. The project failed to yield a representation of church members significantly younger or older than this median age range to show a difference in how women handle and converse about grief. Even with the differences of grief experiences from as recent as three months to upwards of twenty years, I noted when discussions took place during the virtual sessions, the women were hesitant to run with a topic on being an African American women and converse without prompts or guidance. The historical precedence of not talking about private family affairs (i.e., the idiom what happens in the house, stays in the house) may have penetrated this grief support group, especially when the church membership has roots in identical family trees.

Within the group persons had differing thoughts about being an African American woman and the stereotype of being “Super woman” or “Strong Black Woman.” Not all the women expressed the same sentiments. This was surprising to hear, because thinking that “all” African American women would feel the same about the idea of being a “Strong Black Woman” was stereotypical thinking. Although some of the women spoke up and provided their experiences of being an African American woman, it failed to translate into producing a huge discussion as anticipated. I anticipated gleaning more insight from the women in the group from the discussion, but that failed to occur. Introducing the topic of social unrest led to more discussion, minus a lot of insight. Perhaps the demographic of education and differences in social economics plays a part

when it came to discussing the same perspective about being a strong Black woman. One outlier, a participant who lives in the outskirts of Atlanta, Georgia, was adamant about not agreeing with the strong Black woman model that the discussion presented. Given her residence, she finds herself living and working in a very urban, though predominately African American city that has an elevated socio-economic demographic than rural Virginia. These factors may affect how this participant's perspective on the topic compared to other women who live in a rural county in Virginia.

As a review, out of the ten participants, four of them have formal education, having earned an undergraduate degree, with one of them also holding a master's degree. The lack of conversation may result from a personal history that fails to include an extensive formal education, living and working all one's adult life within a confined-rural community and without statewide or even world travel experiences. Yet where the women failed to be forthcoming in discussion, the focused journal entries, RGEI instrument and pre- and post-grief surveys revealed moments of transparency regarding emotions of depression and family disconnection since the loss of their loved one. As stated earlier, the lone Georgia resident virtually joined nine other women who reside within the project context of rural Goochland, Virginia.

The Project Evaluation revealed how much the participants learned and appreciated the grief support group. They were attentive to submitting their forms, surveys, focused journal entries and lastly the project evaluation by US Mail. This critique shows how much the women have gained in tools to ensure a healthy journey to start or continue the process of healing from the emotional toll experienced when a loved

one has died. The comments speak volumes of how the grief support group meant to the women who volunteered for this project.

The first question asks if each participant gained insight on how to handle grief, which was answered “yes.” Five participants added detailed and personalized comments. The first person stated “I’ve learned that it’s better to listen to someone that is grieving rather than providing your experience/story. The person may not be at that level yet to hear your experience.” Another added “I learned the different stages of grief and it is a process and is different for everyone.” A third participant noted that “I’ve learned to use the word ‘I’ when expressing my feelings with others who are able to give me help and guidance. I know it’s okay and healthy to cry and get it out.” In addition, one woman stated that “I’ve gained better insight because grief is personal, and it’s determined by physical state. You may have different feelings such as sadness, overwhelmed, fear, anger and so on. Participating in this project grief support group and commitment to oneself is truly needed to get through the loss of a loved one.” The fifth person reported that “You have to ask hard questions and it’s ok to ask those questions of God, but most importantly you have to face it.”

Most of the women’s perceptions of how African American women handle grief since participating in the grief support changed (Figure 22). Three of the women who answered in the affirmative left additional insight because of their attendance in this project. The first noted that you must “Take care of yourself first to enable you to take care of others. It’s okay to acknowledge you are not super woman.” Another stated that “it’s shown me that on being one of those women we are strong and stronger now because of God and the connection He has given us to be able to come together as sisters

grieving together. We cry together and we share personal things. This project (grief support group) has given us loving support and much needed and helpful information.”

The third person reported that “I feel unlike myself the ladies pulled on their spiritual strengths which is what I wanted to do but was afraid and didn’t know how even though everyone kept telling me to do so but I’m on the right path.”

Three-quarters of the women (including the Georgia resident) who failed to change in perception on how African American women handle grief shared comments that may reflect more of a progressive mindset in keeping with a woman living in an urban setting, being well-traveled, and/or having a certain level of education. One stated that “I think I didn’t fit the perceived “model” of how/what AA women should do and act. I learned more about grieving process during the project.” The second reported that “As an AA woman I know we tend to think of everyone else first and ourselves last. The same applies in how we handle our grief. We put it aside and push through the day today, all the while we are often hurting because we haven’t dealt with the grief.” The third added that “The discussion is just a reminder that we hold a lot of things in – but we need to release these things.”

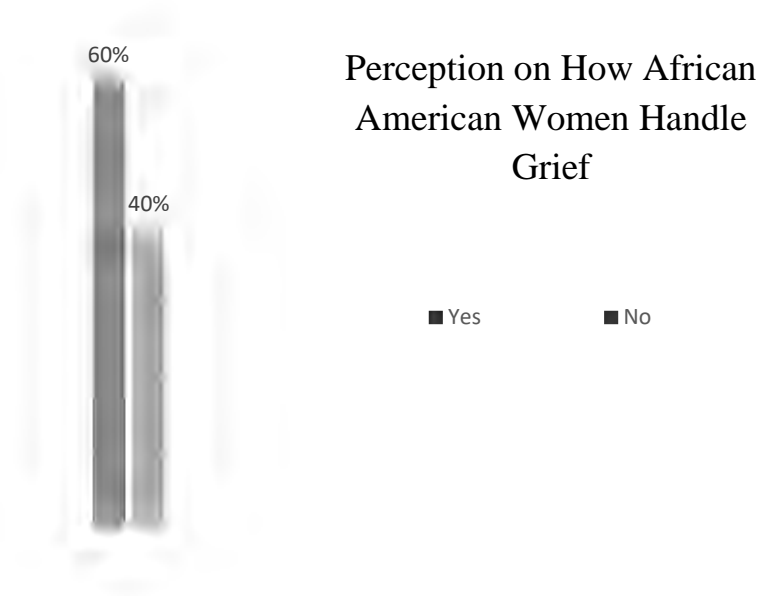


Figure 22. Perception on how African American women handle grief

I asked participants to critique me, as the facilitator, on the presentation, content, and communication skills. The graph shows an impressive rating on my abilities to dispense the information on such a delicate and emotional topic (Figure 23). Eighty percent of the participants rated my presentation at the exceptional and good level with a 100% effectiveness with my organizational skills. One participant added the following comment: “excellent class/ excellent presenter, very knowledgeable, thorough, great class and great participants.” Nine participants rated the facilitator with marks of “exceptional” on each of the following sub-categories under communication skills when it came to the delivery of the information conveyed for the grief support group’s six-week session (Figure 24). One participant gave “exceptional” ratings to the first three sub-categories and failed to answer the final category of whether the facilitator “used active listening skills?” Perhaps this was an oversight, or the question was unclear to the participant.

Evaluation of Project Presentation Style

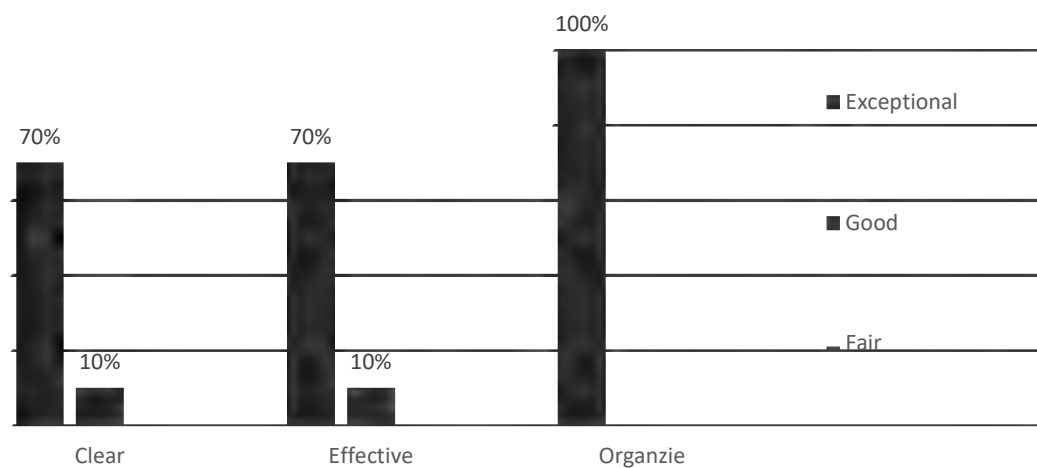


Figure 23. Evaluation of project presentation style

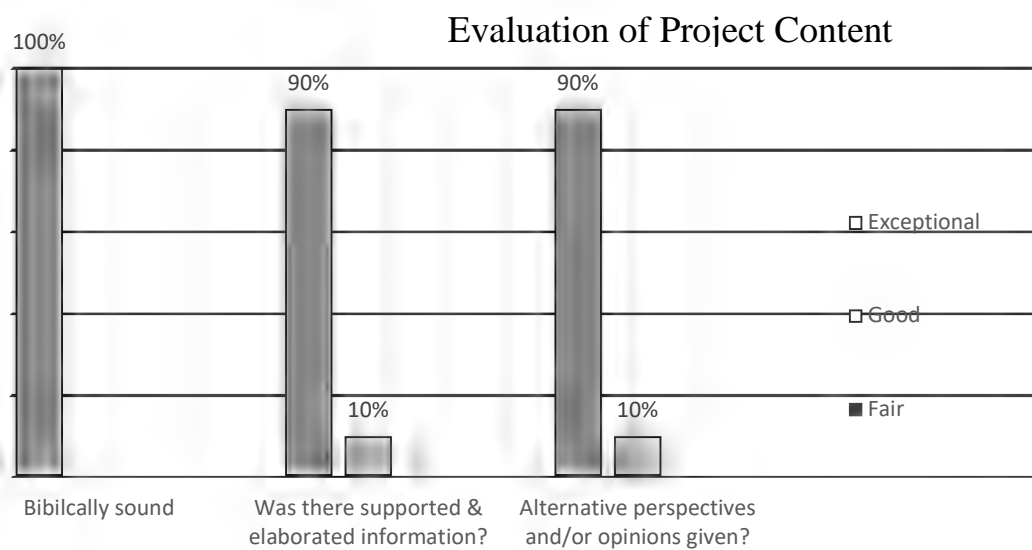


Figure 24. Evaluation of project content



Figure 25. Evaluation of leader's communication skills

When it came to whether the participants “would refer a church member to attend this ministry group?” and “would refer a non-church member to this group if opened to the public?” there was unanimous approval. These women co-signed on what will provide a legacy of self-care and mental health care for generations to come. All it takes is a seed planted by one in a family who exhibits how to work through the journey of grief and thrives versus simply existing in life; it is not too late to start this process to make a change in one's life and the lives of the surviving family members.

Like any journey, one looks forward to the destination. As one who grieves, one looks forward to healing from grief which re-establishes one to a new normal without that deceased loved one. This process takes time, and it is worth going through to become a whole person, and not a person who is literally in pieces. Overall, I believe I did well in implementing and leading the grief support group toward the process of gaining awareness about grief. Having more knowledge about traumatic death would have helped

me facilitate, as several of the group participants felt that their loss was a traumatic experience.

As COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, I am planning an in-person grief support retreat for the participants of this project in the fall 2021 at the historic monastery of Richmond Hill located in Richmond, Virginia's historic Church Hill community. I hope that this gathering will allow the women to come together in that intimate setting and continue to provide that support to each other as they continue to process grief. This is the perfect location for the women of the grief support group because this is a known location serving as stewards for Christian fellowship and retreats since 1987. Although the project ended, the journey for me has not. With the information that I learned from the implementation of this project, I would like to do further studies on the impacts of collective grief and transgenerational trauma as it relates to African Americans communities from the time of slavery to the present.

Additional Findings

During Week Three of the grief support group, we focused on the types of grief and coping tools. I chose the theme "Now What?" as a way for the participants to think about how to maneuver their grief and the emotions that play out from crying to over-eating or spending, isolation, or admitting that they failed to cope at all. When I posed the question "How Does Grief Feel?" I received a plethora of responses from the grief support group. The range of emotions vary just as much when recalled during this session as if it was freshly expressed grief. Participants uses expressions such as "Rip your heart

out. Heart shatter,” lost, sad, angry (twice), helpless, lonely, overwhelm, low self-esteem, questioning, heavy burden, share with others, disappointments, and weak.

During Week Four we explored The Importance of Establishing Rituals with the theme “The Holidays are Coming.” As facilitator I led a brief discussion on the topic of African American end of life rituals such as the meaning of the “homegoing service,” as in returning to home (Africa) or Heaven where one is free. I played negro spirituals (i.e., “Oh What a Beautiful City,” “Oh Glory,” and “Oh Freedom!”) for the participants during the discussion to listen to the lyrics that reflect the thought of Heaven and freedom. I explained how slaves failed to necessarily look upon death as a “bad” ending for life, but a way to freedom. In the session we discussed that the “homegoing” thought perhaps was passed down through generations for African Americans through end-of-life rituals. Participants provided in the discussion what they thought were common African American end-of-life rituals. The list consists of Sorority and Fraternity end-of-life rituals, repass celebration, family visitation, donations to the family (food and money), celebration of life funerals, celebratory processions, and long funeral services. After reviewing the list provided, I noted these end-of-life rituals could occur in any cultural and ethnic group and are not specific to the African American culture.

During Week Five we explored Grieving as an African American Woman with the theme “Being Super Woman (A Strong Black Woman).” Four of the women of the group stated during the discussion that they learned how to be “strong” from their mothers, grandmothers, aunts (basically the woman that raised them). Although some of the lessons they learned were taught verbally, they learned many of the lessons by watching the women in their lives handle life. The woman stated that they saw these

women in their lives handle everything (i.e., raising children, dealing with cheating husbands, and death of children) and kept moving forward in life. They saw the woman take care of family, work, and continue to be active in church and community and never complain. They even witnessed these women often get sick but kept taking care of everything and everyone else, while putting their needs last.

Our final session, Week Six, was a review of information pertaining to healing from grief. The theme “Wrap It Up” was just what the participants did in summarizing the sessions. Persons summarized what they learned by noting that “It’s okay to feel emotions,” “Don’t deal with the grief alone (Grief Support Group, Church Family, Support Circle and Community),” and “Take care of yourself (mentally, spiritually, and physically).” Other participants advised persons to “Get professional assistance,” “Join a local support group or non-profit organization that aligns with your needs and beliefs,” and “Ask for help (Use your support system).” They expressed what they learned to heal. This last session is a pre-cursor to how much and valuable the grief support group made an impact on these women.

Conclusion

The hypothesis stated that if the women of County Line Baptist Church are given the tools to process grief, they will gain awareness of how to adapt to stages of loss and begin to heal from the death of a loved one. After reviewing the participants’ results from their pre- and post-surveys, focused journaling, and RGEI, I assessed how the participants gained awareness of how to adapt to stages of loss and begin to heal from the death of a loved one. The project proved the hypothesis as a guide for the project

“Hurting Sister: A Woman’s Response to Loss” with some notable limitations. The curriculum proposed goals for learning about grief with tools used to start the healing from the pain when a loved one dies. First, participants learned to define terms related to loss and grief via Kübler-Ross and Kessler’s Stages of Grief, Worden’s Task of Mourning, and Bowlby’s Attachment Theory. Second, the participants learned that grief has no timetable and cannot be healed within a particular set timeframe and cycle. Participants realized that not every human being processes the loss of a loved one the same way. Participants in this inaugural project identified on the pre-survey that they grieved losses from as recent as three months ago and as old as twenty years, therefore some participants enter the support group with some range of perspectives of the grief process. Participating in this group allowed the women to start and, in some cases, continue processing their grief with some knowledge of grief process in mind.

The group sessions displayed that grief fails to know how to tell time. Two participants of the support group experienced the loss of a family member that complicated grief experiences. Due to the death of a loved one, one of the participants was absent from one of the sessions to be with family members while the support group continued. Third, the participants learned that coping skills exist to heal versus living with grief and reacting in an unhealthy manner to grief (i.e., depression, over-eating or spending, drug usage, etc.). Fourth, establishing or maintaining rituals to memorialize and process grief of a deceased loved one establishes how they still exist in the lives of surviving family via ceremonies of remembrance, family gatherings, or participation in a charitable event (i.e., walk or run) and/or a donation in the memory of the loved one. Finally, participants learned all these tools in the company of other African American

women, which provided encouragement and empowered them as they processed their grief. The women related to other women in the group who had similar perspectives.

APPENDIX A

RESOURCES AND SERVICES FOR GRIEF AND TRAUMA

Resources and Services in the area for Grief and Trauma

- Goochland Cares – <http://www.goochlandcares.org/get-help/resources/>
- Louisa Creative Counseling – <http://www.louisacreativecounseling.com/LinksResources.en.html>
- <https://richmond-therapy.com>
- <https://thriveworks.com/richmond-therapy/richmond-counselors/>
- <http://www.compassionatefriendsrva.org/Richmond%20Support%20Groups%20May%202018.pdf>
- <https://fullcirclegc.org>
- <https://www.centerforchristiancounseling.net>
- Grief Resource Center – <http://www.jfitzgeraldgrc.com>
- Charlottesville Counseling – https://thriveworks.com/charlottesville-therapy/?utm_source=GMBlisting&utm_medium=organic
- Richmond Creative Counseling – <https://www.richmondcreativecounseling.com>

APPENDIX B

SURVEYS, FORMS, AND QUESTIONNAIRES

SURVEYS / FORMS/QUESTIONNAIRES

“Hurting Sister: A Woman Response to Loss” Grief Ministry

OUR MISSION

To Provide An Opportunity For Individual Women and Families To Share Their Grief “Confidentially” With The Ministry. To Provide Support, Comfort and Direction Through Sharing, Trusting and Prayer.

OUR PURPOSE

- Define grief
- To assist you in dealing with and overcoming your grief.
- Providing a relaxed atmosphere
- Confidentiality
- Assist with seeking professional help

County Line Baptist Church of Goochland, Virginia is sponsoring a grief ministry for women, *Hurting Sister: A Woman Response to Loss*. This pilot ministry is targeted to CLBC Women, age 18 years and older who have experienced the loss of a loved one (**First come, first serve. Note: not for families at this time**). The six-week grief support group will start Tuesday, February 23, 2021 and ends Tuesday, March 30, 2021. The sessions will be held via Zoom (with a potential for an onsite session, TBD). If you are interested in this new ministry an informational meeting will be available, the January 24, 2021 @ 5pm. We will also be asking for volunteers to join this ministry. However, a limited number of volunteers will be chosen. We will update you as we unfold strategies and decisions.

For many individuals and families, grief can impair their inability to continue their daily life functions and can also impair their ability to participate in the praise, worship, prayer and service life of the church. Thus, let us continue to pray for God’s healing strength and comfort for our Church family. **You’re Not Alone! We Need Each Other To Lean On!!**

(✂ Tear on dotted line and submit ✂)

Please RSVP by placing this form in the insert box during the offering or by contacting Rev. Adreania Tolliver (email: xxxxxxxxxx) directly by the third week in February. If you have any questions or feedback regarding this new ministry please feel free to call.

Name _____

Address _____ City / State / Zip

Home Phone # _____ Cell Phone # _____

Name of you deceased loved one _____ ☐ Adult ☐
Child
Death date _____ Relationship to you _____

Consent Form

Project Title: "Hurting Sister: A Woman Response to Loss" Grief Ministry at County Line Baptist Church, Goochland, Virginia

Project Director: Rev. Adreania Tolliver

Name of participant: _____
(Please print first and last name)

Are you at least 18 years old? _____ yes _____no

Please read and initial each section below.

Your initials indicate you have read and understand each section.

The Research Project

_____ This project is designed to explore ways for the church to attract, engage and understand how to retain adult female members for the future of the ministry. The study will attempt to identify reasons Adult Women may actively become involved in a regular grief ministry support group practice at County Line Baptist Church, what attracts them to a church, and identify other practical methodologies for retaining them in ministry.

Expectations of the Human Research Subject

_____ After my consent to participate in the study, I will complete a Pre-Survey that will provide initial input for the project. Each week I will participate in a different phase of the project. The phases will include an introduction, centering moment, teaching moment, an application moment, journaling (during the sessions and for homework), a post-survey and celebration of life.

Consent

_____ I agree to participate in this project as a human research subject. I understand that at any point in this project I can withdraw my participation without explanation. I understand that if I elect to withdraw my participation it will have no effect on my membership at County Line Baptist Church. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation as a human research subject for this project.

Confidentiality

_____ I understand that this consent form, questionnaires, surveys and other collected data will be maintained and stored in strict compliance with privacy in Rev. Tolliver's locked file cabinet in her home/church office, XXXXXXXXXX. All electronic data will be deleted, and all paper data collected will be shredded after the final examination of the dissertation. The Project Director will be the only one with access to the information.

Risks for Human Research Subjects

_____ I do not foresee any risks in taking part of this research. I understand that my responses will be covered in anonymity and no one will be able to deduce from my responses my exact identity. If the project director choses to use quotes from my feedback, it will be anonymous. My contributions to the study will be safeguarded from public view for the duration of the study.

Benefits of the Study

_____ I understand that the benefits of participating in this research would be an opportunity to explore ways of healing after the loss of a loved one and feeling empowered to handle the loss that will impact how the grief ministry support group of County Line Baptist Church will reach others women and in the future men and teens.

_____ I offer my participation voluntarily and without coercion.

_____ I agree to be interviewed at my convenience if I give my permission.

Please initial one box only

_____ I agree to be interviewed

_____ I do not agree to be interviewed

I agree that by signing this consent form, I acknowledge that I have read, understand and agree with the terms as a human research subject. Even though this consent form bears my signature, I understand I have the right to withdraw entirely without explanation and at any time.

Human subject research signature

Date

Project Director signature

Date

Revised Grief Experience Inventory (RGEI)

Below are a series of general statements. You are to indicate how much you agree or disagree with them. Be as honest as possible. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers to these questions.

Read each item and decide quickly how you feel about it; then circle the number of the item that best describes your feelings. Put down your first impressions. Please answer every item.

	Agreement			disagreement		
	<u>slight</u>	<u>moderate</u>	<u>strong</u>	<u>strong</u>	<u>moderate</u>	<u>slight</u>
1. I tend to be more irritable with others since the death of my loved one.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. I frequently experience angry feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. My arms and legs feel very heavy.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. I have feelings of guilt because I was spared and the deceased was taken.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. I feel lost and helpless.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. I have had frequent headaches since the death.		1	2	3	4	5
7. I cry easily.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Concentrating on things is difficult.			1	2	3	4
					5	6

	agreement			disagreement		
	<u>slight</u>	<u>moderate</u>	<u>strong</u>	<u>strong</u>	<u>moderate</u>	<u>slight</u>
9. I feel extremely anxious and unsettled.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Sometimes I have a strong desire to scream.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. Life has lost its meaning for me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. I am not feeling healthy.	1	2	3	4	5	6

	agreement			disagreement		
	<u>slight</u>	<u>moderate</u>	<u>strong</u>	<u>strong</u>	<u>moderate</u>	<u>slight</u>
13. I frequently feel depressed.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. I have the feeling that I am watching myself go through the motions of living.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. Life seems empty and barren.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. I have frequent mood changes.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. Small problems seem overwhelming.	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. I have lost my appetite.	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. I seem to have lost my energy.	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. I seem to have lost my self-confidence.	1	2	3	4	5	6
21. I am usually unhappy.	1	2	3	4	5	6
22. I am awake most of the night.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Participant #: _____

Demographic Questionnaire

1. Age _____
2. Education:

<input type="checkbox"/> Did not graduate high school <input type="checkbox"/> High school grad <input type="checkbox"/> Some college	<input type="checkbox"/> College graduate <input type="checkbox"/> Masters degree (Professional) <input type="checkbox"/> Terminal degree
---	---
3. Marital status: _____ Single _____ Married _____ Divorced _____ Widowed
 _____ Partnership
4. Number of children: _____
5. Length of membership at County Line Baptist Church: _____
6. Is your family a member at County Line Baptist Church: ____ Yes ____ No
7. Ministry area where you served:

8. Are you a **current** Ministry Leader / Officer in the Church? ____ Yes ____ No. If Yes, what is your role?

9. Are you a **previous** Ministry Leader / Officer in the Church? ____ Yes ____ No. If Yes, what is your role?

10. Have you ever left County Line Baptist Church? ____ Yes ____ No
11. If you ever left County Line Baptist Church, how long were you gone? _____.
 Have you returned to County Line Baptist Church? ____ Yes ____ No
 - a. When you left County Line Baptist Church, did your family leave as well?

____ Yes ____ No

Thank you for your cooperation and time.

Participant #: _____

Pre-Grief Survey

1. I have experienced loss in the:

<input type="checkbox"/> last 90 days	<input type="checkbox"/> within the last 5 years
<input type="checkbox"/> within the year	<input type="checkbox"/> never
<input type="checkbox"/> within the last 3 years	

2. I have recently experienced the following type of loss:

<input type="checkbox"/> death of a loved one	<input type="checkbox"/> employment
<input type="checkbox"/> a relationship ended	<input type="checkbox"/> home
<input type="checkbox"/> primary custody of a child	<input type="checkbox"/> vehicle

3. This is how I've responded to the loss:

<input type="checkbox"/> crying a lot more	<input type="checkbox"/> overspending / online or in-store
<input type="checkbox"/> sleeping a lot more than usual	<input type="checkbox"/> oversharing on social media
<input type="checkbox"/> eating more	<input type="checkbox"/> seek a counselor / therapist
<input type="checkbox"/> turn to drugs	<input type="checkbox"/> pray
<input type="checkbox"/> started smoking / smoking more	<input type="checkbox"/> talk to friends and family
	<input type="checkbox"/> I haven't addressed the loss

4. This is how I am responding to my grief:

<input type="checkbox"/> I feel numb / nothing	<input type="checkbox"/> I feel overwhelmed
<input type="checkbox"/> I feel angry	<input type="checkbox"/> I can handle it

5. Describe how you cope with grief:

6. Have you sought grief counseling or therapy before?

7. Has dealing with grief affected your relationship with God? If yes, how?

8. Has grief created brokenness in your life?

9. How has mourning the loss of a loved one affected your relationships:

... in your family:

... in your circle of friends:

... in your church family:

10. Do you believe that the church should be a source of healing for those persons who have experienced grief? If yes, Why or why Not?

11. Are you open to healing from grief and what does that look like to you?

12. Explain what will best help you handle your loss:

Thank you for your cooperation and time.

Participate # _____

Post-Grief Survey

1. I have experienced loss in the:

<input type="checkbox"/> last 90 days	<input type="checkbox"/> within the last 5 years
<input type="checkbox"/> within the year	<input type="checkbox"/> never
<input type="checkbox"/> within the last 3 years	

2. I have recently experienced the following type of loss:

<input type="checkbox"/> death of a loved one	<input type="checkbox"/> employment
<input type="checkbox"/> a relationship ended	<input type="checkbox"/> home
<input type="checkbox"/> primary custody of a child	<input type="checkbox"/> vehicle

3. This is how I've responded to the loss:

<input type="checkbox"/> crying a lot more	<input type="checkbox"/> overspending / online or in-store
<input type="checkbox"/> sleeping a lot more than usual	<input type="checkbox"/> oversharing on social media
<input type="checkbox"/> eating more	<input type="checkbox"/> seek a counselor / therapist
<input type="checkbox"/> turn to drugs	<input type="checkbox"/> pray
<input type="checkbox"/> started smoking / smoking more	<input type="checkbox"/> talk to friends and family
	<input type="checkbox"/> I haven't addressed the loss

4. This is how I am responding to my grief:

<input type="checkbox"/> I feel numb / nothing
<input type="checkbox"/> I feel angry
<input type="checkbox"/> I feel overwhelmed
<input type="checkbox"/> I can handle it

5. Describe how you cope with grief:
6. Have you sought grief counseling or therapy before?
7. Has dealing with grief affected your relationship with God? If yes, how?
8. Has grief created brokenness in your life?
9. How has mourning the loss of a loved one affected your relationships:
... in your family:

... in your circle of friends:

... in your church family:

10. Do you believe that the church should be a source of healing for those persons who have experienced grief? If yes, Why or why Not?
11. Are you open to healing from grief and what does that look like to you?
12. Explain what will best help you handle your loss:

Thank you for your cooperation and time.

Hurting Sisters: Grief Ministry Support Group for Women

Participate # _____

Date _____

Project Evaluation

1. Have you gained better insight on how to handle grief since your participation in this project?
2. Has your perception of how African-American women handle grief changed since participating in this project?

Exceptional	Good	Average	Poor
4	3	2	1

PRESENTATION	Exceptional	Good	Average	Poor	N/A
Clear					
Effective					
Organized					

CONTENT	Exceptional	Good	Average	Poor	N/A
Biblically sound					
Was there supported & elaborated information?					
Alternative perspectives and/or opinions given?					

COMMUNICATION SKILLS	Exceptional	Good	Average	Poor	N/A
Information clearly explained.					
Was there a clear, easy to read slide presentation?					
Were questions answered with authority?					
Used active listening skills?					

Please answer each question by placing an “X” in the box

REFERRAL	YES	NO
Would you refer a church member to attend this ministry?		
Would refer to a non-church member if opened to the public?		

APPENDIX C

SUPPORT GROUP INFORMATION AND WEEKLY SESSION SLIDE DECK

Implementation Information Discussion



CLBC Women Grief Support Group-Pilot

- Purpose-
 - Participants will gain information and methodology to start the process of addressing their grief.
 - Results will be used for my Doctoral of Ministry Project
- Type of Grief Address
 - Death of a loved one
- Participants—
 - At least 18 y/o
 - African American Women
 - Non-Pregnant
 - # 15 Max

When/How to Meet

- Calendar
 - 6-7 Weeks
 - 1.5hrs
 - 1 day/week
- Online
 - Zoom
 - Private Area



Expectation of the Group

- Participation in Group
 - Assignments
 - Homework
 - Focused Journaling
 - Surveys & Questionnaires
- Confidentiality
 - What it shared....stays in the room
 - Alias#
 - Except....
 - Risk being withdrawn from the Group
 - Only I will be privy to information

Outline of Sessions

- Teaching
- Biblical Studies
- Application





Interested?????

Rev. Adreania M. Tolliver

- Email:
- Cell: XXX-XXX-XXXX
- Complete Form
- Forms Due Date: 13th Feb.




Week 1 “It Hurts So Bad-Grief”

- Getting Started
- Housekeeping Notes
- Consent Form
- Demographics Questionnaire
- Packet Items
- Pre-Grief Survey



Group Developed Ground Rules 2/2021

- Feel free to share
- Respect each other feelings
- Confidentiality
- Support each other
- Honest
- My grief is legitimate
- No judgement
- No cross talking
- Show love each other
- Do the work
- It's okay to be scared
- Be humble
- It's to be mad even at God
- It's okay to cry
- Allow yourself to grieve
- Speak in “I”



What's your story?

Story-linking

STORIES

Choose a Bible Story.
Who are you?
Why & Where are you on the Grief Journey?
Why did you choose the Bible Story?
What has help you navigate through the
grief journey in the past?

Homework

- **Complete Pre-Grief Survey**



Week 2
"On the Grief Journey"

- Define Grief
- Define Mourning
- Define Bereavement
- Explain Stages of Grief
- Explain Bowlby's Attachment Theory



Centering Moment

Read & Reflect on the John 11: 1-27 as it applies to you and grief

¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. ²¹ "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she replied. "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." ²⁸ After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. ³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

How does grief feel(Group Responses)?

- Rip your heart out. Heart shatter.
- Lost
- Helpless
- Lonely
- Heavy-burden
- Share with others
- Weak
- Sad
- Angry x2
- Overwhelm
- Low Self- Esteem
- Questioning
- Disappointments



Signs and Symptoms of Grief

- | | |
|--|------------------------------|
| • Shock and disbelief | • Weight loss or weight gain |
| • Sadness, despair, loneliness and empty | • Aches and pains |
| • Guilt, regret, shame | • Night sweats |
| • Anger, feeling resentful | • Heart palpitations |
| • Anxiety, helplessness, insecurity and fear | • Insomnia |
| • Physical symptoms | • Feeling faint |
| • Fatigue | |
| • Nausea | |
| • Sickness | |

Definitions

- **Grief**-is defined as the primarily emotional/affective process of reacting to the loss of a loved one through death.
- **Mourning**- is defined as the public display of grief. mourning emphasizes the external or public expressions of grief.
- **Bereavement** is defined as the objective situation one faces after having lost an important person via death.

Stages of Grief Kubler Ross & Kessler



Bowlby's Attachment Theory

- Close relationships among family members often result in attachment, when that relationship is altered through events such as marriage, estrangement, and death, grief occurs.
- Although it can be normal to attach oneself to a loved one during a relationship, that depth or lack thereof can affect one's grieving process and cause a hindrance in their grieving



Changes that occur after the death of loved one

- Roles
- Family System
- Interests/Goals
- Future
- Unfinished business



Homework

- **Focused Journaling**—Explain your personal experiences with the various stages of grief
- Complete Revised Experience Inventory (RGEI)



Week 3 “Now What”

- **Discuss types of Grief**
- **Disenfranchised grief**
- **Complicated grief**
- **Secondary grief**
- **Identify coping mechanism to grief**



Types of Grief

- **Grief**- primarily emotional/affective process of reacting to the loss of a loved one through death.
- **Anticipatory Grief**-
- **Disenfranchised Grief**-Grief that person's experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, socially sanctioned or publicly mourned.
- **Complicated Grief**-Complicated grief is grief that may not diminish or resolve naturally given time and space to live the experience.
- **Secondary Grief**-Secondary grief or loss is the psychological and physical reactions of the bereaved person experienced due to loss of a loved one

Coping Mechanism of Grief

- Journaling
- Lamenting(crying)
- Prayer
- Take Care of yourself & set boundaries
- Accept your feelings
- Help others dealing w/loss
- Get help
- Talk about the death of your loved one
- Remember & celebrate your loved one



Homework

- **Focused Journaling**—Explain your personal experiences with coping with grief in the past in comparison to now



Week 4- “The Holidays are Coming”

- Define and discuss the important of rituals
- Discuss end of life rituals
- Establishing new rituals



Funeral Rituals

- Confirm and reinforce the reality of death
- Acknowledgment and expressions of feeling loss
- A vehicle for expressing feelings
- Stimulate the recollection of the deceased(stories remembered)
- Begin to accommodate a change in relationship between the deceased



What Do We Believe? *(African American Cultural End of Life Rituals)* *Group Responses*

- Sorority Fraternity Rituals
- Burial Rituals
- Repass
- Wakes/ Viewing
- Visit Family
- Offer food to family grieving
- Calls to Family
- Praying
- Donations to Family
- Processional
- Homegoing-Celebration



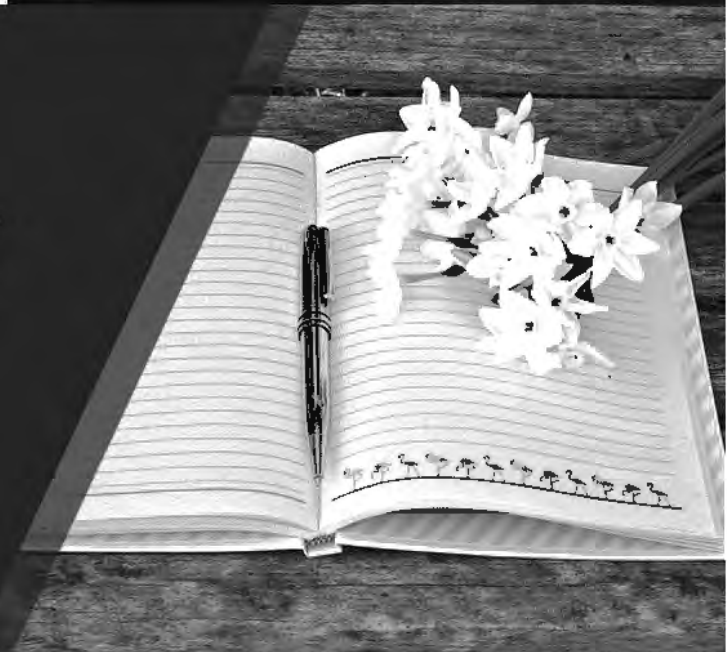
Establish New Rituals

- Rituals of Continuity
- Rituals of Transition
- Rituals of Affirmation
- Rituals of Reconciliation



Homework

- Focused Journaling-Do you think you would like to start a new ritual or continue a ritual that will help you process your grief of a loved one?
- Why? What is the new ritual?



Week 5-
"Strong Black Woman"

- Describe cultural and social as it relates to African American Women
- Discuss how African American Women express grief



**Do you have to be
strong?**



Homework

- Focused Journaling: Explain how do you see yourself as an African American Woman that is grieving?



Week 6 "Wrap Up"

- Tasks of Mourning
- Moving Forward



Tasks of Mourning

- Task 1- Accept the reality of the loss
- Task2- Process the pain of grief
- Task 3- Adjust to a world without the deceased
- Task 4- Find a way to remember the deceased while moving forward in life



Moving Forward

- Feel
- Don't deal with it alone (Church Family & Community)
- Take care of yourself
- Get professional assistance
- Join a local support group
- Ask for help (Have a support group)
- Get to the root of unfinished problems as much as possible



Homework

- Complete Post Survey and Project Evaluation



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